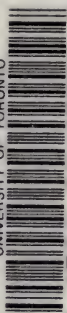


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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ESSAYS

BY THE LATE
WILLIAM GODWIN,
AUTHOR OF POLITICAL JUSTICE, ETC., ETC., ETC.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE Essays and Fragments contained in this volume were written by Mr. Godwin in the last years of his long and laborious life; they would, he trusted, be revised and arranged for immediate publication by his daughter, Mrs. Shelley. In a letter addressed to her, dated only a few days before his death, he says, "I leave behind me a manuscript in a considerable state of forwardness for the press, entitled, 'The Genius of Christianity Unveiled: in a Series of Essays.'" And the letter concludes with these earnest words:—"I am most unwilling that this, the concluding work of a long life, and written, as I believe, in the full maturity of my understanding, should be consigned to oblivion. It has been the main object of my life, since I attained to years of discretion, to do my part to free the human mind from slavery. I adjure you, therefore, or whomsoever else into whose hands these papers may fall, not to allow them to be consigned to oblivion."

It is not necessary to enter into the many reasons which prevented Mrs. Shelley from personally carrying out her father's wishes: enough to say that the burthen of the duty lay on her, and since her death has lain on her representatives, as one from which, even had they

desired it, there was no escape. But the circumstances under which the Essays now appear are much changed from those which would have attended them had Mrs. Shelley been able to prepare them for the press. The kind of editing possible at the time of Mr. Godwin's death is not possible after the lapse of half a century. To complete and correct what is still imperfect, would demand not only very great agreement with the writer's opinions, but intimate acquaintance with the tone of his mind. If at any time this could have been possessed by one beyond his own immediate circle, it is not possessed by the men of our day. Our reading of history, our estimate of the Bible, whether viewed from the side of orthodoxy or of free thought, our doubts and difficulties, are not those of fifty years since; nor could these Essays be adapted in any great degree to the special requirements of our own time, even if she still lived who had distinct authority to revise and prepare them.

They cannot now be "the signal benefit to the human race" which their author hoped they would be; the conclusions are not so new, or in all cases so true, as they appeared to him. But they are still interesting as the frankly-expressed thoughts of a remarkable man, and as a contribution to the history of scepticism. Those Essays only, therefore, are given, out of the MS. left in Mrs. Shelley's charge, which appear fairly complete, or if fragments, are yet so far finished. They are given unaltered and entire, save that a few verbal changes have been made in the quotations from the Bible. It is quite evident to any one who reads the manuscript that Mr. Godwin quoted from memory, accurately as

regards the spirit, but often by no means accurately as regards the letter. To correct errors thus made has been to fulfil the plain duty of an Editor; to do more would be to tamper with the original.

One further remark appears necessary in reference to the same Biblical passages with which the Essays are so thickly strewed. The disintegrating criticism which has resolved the Bible into its several books, and parts of books, had scarcely begun, or at least its work was scarcely known in England, when Mr. Godwin died. The Bible was considered as a whole, and a verse from any part was deemed, alike by the orthodox and unorthodox, as of precisely the same value with a verse from any other part. It was with no conscious unfairness that Mr. Godwin at times made use of texts which do not to our apprehension support his position, or that he assumes that doctrines held by one writer of Scripture were therefore and of necessity held by the rest.

That the same arguments are repeated in more than one Essay, the same passages quoted, that a doctrine is assailed again and again, may be a literary blemish which the author would have removed, had he himself given his book to the world. But, independently of the obvious reasons for not omitting or altering, it is quite possible that the repetition of sledge-hammer blows was really intended by the writer, and that he deliberately sacrificed to force somewhat of literary grace.

Whatever in these or other matters be the merits or demerits of the Essays, is not for an Editor to discuss; enough to note that their writer's stand-point was not, and could not be precisely, that of perhaps any one person of our time. Mr. Godwin would have been

among the first to recognise our fuller knowledge on many subjects which he has touched. But it may be remarked that in scarcely any case has he failed to point in the direction along which we, the children of a later day, have advanced, even if he did not indicate the precise path we have travelled. And as he very considerably influenced the minds of many of his generation, the thoughts which he conveyed to them are made visible in these Essays, and we in them look on the stream of our own convictions nearer its original source.

So much it has been necessary to say in explanation of the publication, at this time, of the present volume. More would be needless; for though the memories of men quickly fade, though a crowd of new books on almost every subject claims our attention, sometimes with undue noise, it can scarcely be that even this generation, so hurried, so harassed, has altogether forgotten, or will lightly forget, the name of William Godwin.

November 3, 1872.

PRELIMINARY ESSAY

*ON THE EXOTERIC AND ESOTERIC IN PHILOSOPHY
AND THEOLOGY.*

PRELIMINARY ESSAY

On the Exoteric and Esoteric in Philosophy and Theology.

BEFORE we enter upon the following pages, there is a preliminary question which imperiously demands our attention, as to what was called among the ancients the exoteric and esoteric philosophy and theology.

I am of opinion that a great majority of profound and unprejudiced readers will subscribe to the doctrines pleaded for in this work.

But it is a matter worthy of some consideration how far it is proper that such doctrines should be indiscriminately presented to the attention of mankind.

The Ancient Egyptians, the Pythagoreans, the leaders of the Hindoo religion in India, the Druids, and a number of speculative men in all ages, have been of opinion that there is one set of doctrines that it is convenient should be recommended to and imposed upon the vulgar, and another that should be communicated only to such as were found unquestionably worthy of that favour and distinction.

It has been supposed that a long train of previous initiation and trial should precede the communication of that system which is the ultimate result of the examination of the learned, and of those who were inclined and encouraged by means of elaborate research to enquire into the essence of things.

It was imagined that these men had purified themselves from the grosser elements of our kind, and might safely be trusted to look into the innermost sanctuary, and to see nature as it really is, stripped of those false colourings and that dazzling glare under which, for the most part, it appears to the ignorant.

A sort of strength of mind, which can only be the result of long discipline, has been supposed to be necessary to keep men in the path of right conduct by the force of the light of nature only, while the mass of mankind are conceived no otherwise to be held under sufficient restraint but by terrors and bugbears which stand revealed to the eyes of the select few, but which are sufficient, when nothing else would suffice, to check the escapades and enormities of the ordinary race of men.

It is surely, however, a miserable thought, if we are obliged to confess that the herd of our species are to be kept perpetually in the dark, while a small remnant only are permitted to behold the truth itself, and to see things as they are.

But the world of mankind is not so constituted.

There are not two castes of human creatures, between whom there is "a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from one to the other cannot" (Luke xvi. 26), neither superior nor inferior natures being able to overstep the boundary assigned. The apostle very impressively asks, "Who hath made thee to differ?" (1 Cor. iv. 7.) And elsewhere affirms, "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth." (Acts xvii. 26.) And the poet in an unanswerable way enquires, "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands?—organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?—fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer that a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?"

The question is the same as that of political liberty and slavery. There was a time when it was held that it was only a privileged few that were to be the masters of their own actions, while the great majority was to be held in chains, and to move this way and that merely as they were ordered by their imperial lords. This is, of all considerations, the most vital to the community of mankind. So long as we were divided into two classes, the master and the slave, both parties were corrupted—the lower by the condition of their existence being precluded from the influence of almost every generous

motive, every impulse of a loftier sort, and the higher impelled from the first hour of their moral existence to the practice of tyranny and despotism. But that time is happily gone by. All men are acknowledged to partake of a common nature, to have a right to deliberate respecting their system of action; and, having deliberated, to conduct themselves accordingly. This is the most important revolution that has occurred in the history of the world. The equality of human beings as such, opens upon us the prospect of perpetual improvement. It is of consequence not true that the mass of our species is to be held for ever in leading-strings, while a few only are to have the prerogative of thinking and directing for all, but that the whole community is to run the generous race for intellectual and moral superiority. This thought lies at the foundation of all improvement. It opens to us the prospect of indefinite advancement in sound judgment, in real science, and the just conduct of our social institutions.

Meanwhile it is the art of printing, that greatest of all human discoveries, that has practically, once for ever, settled this question for the race of mankind. This art, which multiplies the copies of books without limit, and finally brings them within the reach of all, has broken down the wall which separated one set of men from another, and has confirmed to all those privileges which the intellectual nature of man rendered by right our common inheritance. Hence education has been placed generally within the

reach of our species. All can reason, can enquire, and attain that knowledge which is most beneficial to every individual. We are set at large from those fetters which for ages bound the inferior and more numerous portion of mankind to the law of an implicit subjection, and are turned loose into the great common of such inferences and solutions as are the natural results of fearless enquiry. It is in vain now to endeavour to re-erect the wall that separated one set of men from another. We might as well endeavour, by planting a hedge, to confine the birds, the native inheritors of the skies, as to prevent men making that use of their reason which reading and reflection naturally supply.

No scheme can be imagined more ungenerous than that which proposes that we, the favoured few, shall enjoy the privilege of letting our thoughts loose to pursue fearlessly the inductions which our understandings suggest, while we are to take care that the vulgar of mankind are to be perpetually shut up within the circumference of a straitened and a narrow creed, never to look upon the broad face of day, nor to enlarge the faculty of sight so as to take in the whole of the blue firmament that over-canopies us. This, of all kinds of aristocracies, is the most inexorable and despotic. Religion is naturally the equalizer of mankind. The small and the great are together in that future state, the belief of which is taught in our churches. Whatever distinctions of rank are imposed in our political constitutions,

they are all put an end to by death. The greatest monarch, we are told, shall stand shivering before the throne of the Almighty, and shall be judged by the same inexorable law as the meanest peasant. It is therefore too bad that this great equalizer should be used, as in modern policy it is, as the main instrument to keep down the illiterate in the state of subjection to which we doom them. The high and the titled ranks among the clergy, though they may not believe all that is taught in the Liturgy, must profess it in public, that the lower ranks may be kept in order. They bow the knee, that the vulgar, taught by their example, may do the like, and may really believe what is pretended only by their superiors.

And what is worse—according to the newest fashion, the man who professes infidelity among his confidential associates is the very person who is the most systematical in enforcing orthodoxy upon his inferiors. He revels in his liberty, and makes it his boast that he has freed himself from all superstitious shackles ; at the same time that he holds it for “very stuff of the conscience” not to let in the least glimmering of light upon his servants, and those who are placed in a station below him.

PREFACE TO ESSAY I.

PREFACE TO ESSAY I.

THE contents of the following Essay will be considered as startling by many, and offensive by more. One of the best apologies I can urge has been brought forward by Dr. Conyers Middleton in the Preface to his "Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church through several successive centuries." I persuade myself that the life and faculties of man, at the best but short and limited, cannot be employed more rationally or laudably than in the search of knowledge ; and especially of that sort which relates to our duty and conduces to our happiness. In these enquiries, therefore, whenever I perceive any glimmering of truth before me, I readily pursue and endeavour to trace it to its source without any reserve or caution of pursuing the discovery too far, or opening too great a glare of it to the public. I look upon the discovery of anything which is true as a valuable acquisition to society, which

cannot possibly hurt or obstruct the good effect of any other truth whatsoever; for they all partake of one common essence, and necessarily coincide with each other, and, like the drops of rain which fall separately into the river, mix themselves at once with the stream, and strengthen the general current.

For myself, however, I must confess that, though always ambitious of fame, I have desired that it should be mixed with a certain degree of approbation and esteem, and, if that might be, of love; and can cordially adopt the sentence which the Chæronean sage delivers of himself, when he says, "I had rather it should be averred of me that there never was such a man as Plutarch, than it should be said that Plutarch was tyrannical, malicious, and revengeful." Meanwhile, whoever would endeavour to instruct mankind, must bring himself to a certain pitch of resolution, and be contented to incur much obloquy, opprobrium, and ill-will; too happy if the more respectable and loftier-minded of mankind do justice to his motives and his character.

I have always also been of opinion that a certain portion of what may be called the "religious sense" is necessary to the sound and healthy condition of the human mind. I have been of a judgment opposite to that of Horace, that "to admire" is an excellent and improving habit. That we should behold the works of nature with wonder and awe, that we should stand

astonished at the symmetry, harmony, subtlety, and beauty of the world around us, is natural and reasonable ; and that we should feel how frail and insignificant a part we constitute of the great whole, can alone inspire us with a proper sobriety and humility, and make us sensible of our real state and condition.

But I think that religion encroaches too far on the human understanding, when it proposes to deprive us of our senses, or prohibits in whatever direction the use of our reasoning powers.

When I sat down to write this Essay, I intended no more than to establish this seemingly incontrovertible truth. The doctrine of a state of future retribution has been maintained for the purpose of completing our view of the Divine benevolence, and removing all difficulties that arise from the seemingly great proportion of natural and moral evil which presents itself in our present condition of existence. Hence it follows that we have a plain criterion to direct us as to what views we shall adopt, and what views we shall reject, in our conceptions of the state in which mankind shall exist hereafter. Those notions only are entitled to our adoption which tend to render our ideas of the Divine benevolence more uniform and complete, that shall remove any apparent objections, and shall take away the inequalities that seem to rest upon the happiness and unhappiness of man in this world. Those notions, on the other hand, we are most of all called upon to reject, if such there

are, the tendency of which would be to obscure and impeach the Divine benevolence, and to place in a worse condition than before the unhappiness of which so large a portion of mankind seems, in their present state, to have reason to complain.

I thought I saw in the vulgar creed of a majority of Christians a tendency of the latter sort, and that their notions, instead of rendering more amiable our ideas of the Divine benevolence, contributed much to increase our objections against the full display of that attribute. I purposed therefore to lighten the terrors of a great part of mankind, and to instil into their bosoms a certain serenity and confidence as to their views of a future world.

I found however, unfortunately, as I proceeded, that the gloomy views of a future state were by no means confined to a sect of narrow-minded Christians, but that they received too much countenance from the original and authentic records of the Founder of our religion. We are somewhat blinded through Christendom by our partialities, and the prejudices instilled into us in our education. We hear of the meek and lowly Jesus so much, of his patience and forbearance, as to cast into shade the tremendous and unsparing denunciations with which his discourses, and those of his apostles, are plentifully interspersed.

Meanwhile, having found this, I could not for a moment prevail on myself to adopt the dastardly plan of urging my objections against certain parties of the

followers of Christ, when it appeared that these objections applied with equal force to the discourses of our original Founder. Add to which, I should have had to seek with considerable labour among the writings of the heads of different sects, for their statements of the views I designed to oppose, while one sect and another would perhaps be eager to disclaim the views with which I charged them, and accuse me of misrepresentation. But when I produced these gloomy and deplorable views from the so-called sacred writings, there would be little room for controversy, and at least one sect of Christians and another could not, with much reason, excuse themselves, and endeavour to shift the burthen to the shoulders of a more obnoxious party.

I am truly astonished, when I call to mind how many persons have admitted the sentiment, or rather, I might say, how universal is the creed of hell and damnation, and that much the greater part of mankind are reserved in a future state to a perpetual exile from joy, and a condition of great suffering and wretchedness, as the due retribution for their behaviour in this transitory world. For myself, I must frankly confess that, if one human creature is reserved for eternal punishment hereafter, it appears to form a more serious difficulty in the way of the assertion of the Divine benevolence, than the sufferings of thousands and tens of thousands of our fellow-beings in the present state, where we “come forth like a

flower, and are cut down; we flee like a shadow and continue not." (Job xiv. 2.)

And yet, in fact, the greater part of mankind through the larger division of the civilized world have made a formal and public profession of this creed through successive centuries. Many men, through an impatience of really slight and insignificant evils, have been found to invoke the instant hand of death to put an end to their sufferings. But most undoubtedly, in comparison with this calamitous and frightful condition of human existence, that we are, almost every one of us, for aught we know, reserved for a state of eternal torment hereafter, it were better for us, a million times better, never to have been born.

I will suppose the individual who is at this moment reading these pages to be satisfied that he is one of the elect, reserved for everlasting joy, but that he is nevertheless "saved, yet so as by fire." (1 Cor. iii. 15.) He must in that case have strange misgivings and tinglings, must feel as if he were somewhat scorched by the fierceness of the flames, and were in the condition which I have heard that a pious nonconformist divine once petitioned might fall to the lot of Louis the Fourteenth, that "God would hold him over the pit of hell by the hair of his head—but, oh Lord, do not let him fall in!" The Son of Man, we are told (Matt. xxv. 31), at the last day, "shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and

they shall gather his elect," those who have had compassion on the "least of the brethren," "from the four winds." And, after all, it is but a "little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom." (Luke xii. 32.)

Now I venture to affirm that, if this man of whom we have spoken, "one of the elect, reserved for everlasting joys," have a heart of true benevolence and philanthropy, he will feel a very imperfect consolation in his own escape, while an infinite majority of mankind "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." (Rev. xiv. 10.) We are told, indeed, that the saints above will entertain so deep a conviction of the Divine justice, as fully to reconcile them to the final award, to fill them with unmingled serenity and satisfaction, and to raise them vastly above the slightest sentiment of compassion and sympathy for the doomed and unhappy sufferers. But what an insult is this to our common sense! "God's thoughts," we are told, "are not our thoughts, neither our ways His ways." (Isaiah lv. 8.) But we cannot talk of the Divine benevolence, unless in a way accordant to our own ideas of that quality. And certainly no human conceptions that we can form can reconcile us to the everlasting torments of an infinite majority of mankind. We must be raised vastly above our present idea of active benevolence before we can acquiesce in a notion so diametrically

at war with our conceptions of justice, not to say of mercy; which in reality, in the most enlarged figure which can be given to it, is but a part of justice.

And, in the meantime, what sort of influence on the human mind must such a creed necessarily exercise over those by whom it is embraced? They must live, in the most emphatical sense of the word, under the "reign of terror." We must divest ourselves wholly of our natural and unperverted conceptions of benevolence, and "call evil good and good evil," before we can rest in this idea of final judgment, and denominate it clemency.

But the Christian world has been so deeply impressed with the notion of the Divine origin of our religion, as to stifle every objection. We have been dragooned into our faith. Our reason has been paralysed by our deep-felt alarms. We have trembled before the red right hand of God stretched out against us, and turned away convulsively from the "cup of His indignation." There was little need in reality to say to us: "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. ix. 20.) Every one will feel into how unequal a contest he will enter, who contends not with "the master of twenty legions," but with the Master of the universe.

Most undoubtedly the mind of him by whom this creed is embraced, must be deeply imbued with the spirit

of pusillanimity, cowering beneath the almighty hand of the disposer of our fates, who, according to the Scriptures, has so little remorse in awarding a tremendous and insufferable punishment. And the more serious and reflecting is the temper of him who entertains this faith, the more memorable will be the effects produced on his character. We can scarcely find any assignable limits for this pusillanimity, and cannot tell in how many directions it insinuates itself to crush our better part of man. Sir Richard Steele, in his gallant and generous remarks on the use of corporal discipline in our public schools, observes, It is impossible for us to say in what degree this treatment affects the future temper of the man, or how much more of sober assurance and intrepidity would have characterised him if he had never in his nonage been subjected to this degrading infliction. The mind is so subtle in its constitution and operations, and the character modified by such an infinite variety of impressions, that the most imperceptible and least observed letting in of an image will often deeply affect—nay, sometimes utterly reverse—the disposition of the individual. But if this trifling and almost evanescent grief produces to the sufferer and the spectator such memorable effects, what may be expected to occur to the mind of him with whom the doctrine of hell forms one of his most leading and least controverted tenets?

It is obvious to every one familiarly acquainted with general history, of how much firmer a temper, how

much more spirited, frank, and devoted to objects of a general interest, were the higher characters—nay, one might almost say the whole community—among the ancient Greeks and Romans, than are we, the men of modern times. It is in vain that we search for and produce instances of poverty of spirit among them, of fluctuation and instability, and liableness to be influenced by sordid and ignoble motives. The fact still is out of all reasonable controversy, that they were of a loftier stature of mind, more firm of nerve, more demonstrative in the display of their principles, less irresolute and effeminate than ourselves. How far, then, we are unavoidably led to enquire, is this deterioration to be ascribed to the slavishness of our creed? The idea that the moment we die, or if with an interval, yet an interval imperceptible to ourselves, we are to stand naked and shivering before the throne of God; to have all our acts investigated, and every idle word brought to light by an inexorable Judge, is somewhat too terrible for the firmest spirit, and may well, even in anticipation, shrink into nothing the ordinary and vulgar soul.

In reality, if we had always this conception present to our thoughts, it would perhaps be impossible for us to endure the load of life. I remember well how this creed weighed on my spirits almost in my infant days—to think that I was born for an eternity either of weal or woe, and much the more probably of the latter.

But it fortunately happens that the mind of man is so constituted as to render belief one of its most uncertain and precarious habits. We entirely credit only what we see, or that is entirely analogous to what we see, or that we are actually assured of by some comprehensive testimony, unquestionably familiar to our thoughts and our experience. The idea of a future state, and a general judgment, of heaven and hell, the notion of either of which we are wholly unable to grasp and define, is so remote from everything we know and have experienced, that the belief may be said to rest on the surface of the mind, without ever having penetrated and being mixed up with its substances. Rousseau says that if you offer a child a sweetmeat, which he is to receive upon condition that he shall leap out of a two-pair-of-stairs window the next morning, he will infallibly accept it. It is in some such way that men think of the promises and denunciations of a future world. A sharp fit of the toothache will have a much more powerful effect than the prospects of eternity. A man at the point of death has his mind almost wholly engrossed with present painful sensations, attends to his family and the persons about him, and feels a lively curiosity upon some fugitive event or some impending political occurrence, nearly to the exclusion of the things he is told will befall him after death. Were it not for this feature of the mind, it would be impossible for a serious Christian to attend to his worldly affairs, or to enter, as we all of

us in some degree do, into the avocations, the amusements, and frivolities of ordinary life. We should be so engrossed by the anticipation of things unseen, as to regard whatever is truly around us with apathy and indifference, and, in a sense beyond that of the apostle, "confess that we were strangers and pilgrims on earth, and that we seek another and a better country." (Heb. xi. 13.)

It will appear in the following Essay, that the punishments of a future world can answer none of the proper ends of punishment, which are that it may serve as an example to others, inasmuch as the doom of all mankind at the last day will be final and irreversible. The most intelligible purpose of these punishments will be that the denunciation of them now will deter men from sin in the present world, and so God will inflict them hereafter, because He who is the God of truth has pronounced that so it shall be.

But if we accurately examine the question, it will be found that there is scarcely the man in existence who truly believes in a future state. The professed devotee strains every nerve, and puts forth his utmost effort, that he may see "in his mind's eye" the alleged impending condition of the blessed and the cursed ; but in vain. The great body of professing Christians acknowledge with their mouths the creed which has been dinned into them ; they repeat what has been taught them for truth ; but it has scarcely any influence on their actions

and lives. It is a thought laid by on all ordinary occasions, and only brought out at church on Sundays, and fasts and festivals. It is so carefully kept as to be in no danger of becoming familiar.

But if it does not operate upon us for the reformation of our lives and the purifying our thoughts, it does not follow that it will be wholly unproductive of important consequences. Man in his proper and most vigorous state, must possess a certain energy, must have his thoughts principally employed on those matters which his judgment has selected as most worthy of attention, and, undiverted and undistracted, devote his efforts to some great and constant end. He that is "unstable as water" may depend upon it that he "shall never excel." (Gen. xlix. 4.) He must put aside all impediments and hindrances, disengage himself from every shackle, however trivial it may appear, and forget what is impertinent and foreign, or he will never do justice either to the purpose he has chosen, or to the faculties he might otherwise bring into action for its attainment.

The sort of belief and no belief which is nearly inseparable from the profession of the Christian faith, renders every man in some degree a hypocrite. Truth is no longer sacred and inviolable to our thoughts. We juggle with the powers of our understanding, and "palter in a double sense." Each of us becomes, in some sort, a double man, and is encumbered with limbs

and articulations which make no proper part of ourselves. Truth is the proper element of the human soul, and frankness its becoming habit. We can never be what under advantageous circumstances we might be expected to become, till our word shall be as sacred as our oath, till ingenuousness is our daily habit, till by self-examination we come to know what we think and what we are, and till we are ready to render to every man an undisguised account of the results of our judgment upon every momentous subject, and the reasons on which our judgment rests for its support.

We profess things which we hardly believe, and most of us, in sacred edifices, and in the face of mankind, lend our countenances and our voice to what obtains with us at best a very doubtful credit.

ESSAY I.

ON A STATE OF FUTURE RETRIBUTION.



ESSAY I.

On a State of Future Retribution.

CHRISTIAN divines inculcate the doctrine of a future state as a state of retribution. "It is a strong argument," says Addison, "for a state of retribution hereafter, that in this world virtuous persons are very often unfortunate, and vicious persons prosperous."

Now let us analyse this species of inference. All our reasonings respecting the cause of all things, and the Author of the universe, come to us *a posteriori*. We observe the evidences (as we apprehend) of design and contrivance in the world around us, and hence infer intelligence in the principle to which the whole is indebted for its origin. We observe much of good, of happiness, and benevolent tendency, and hence infer the benevolence of the contriver.

But if we reason only from what we know, and what we see, we have no right to draw conclusions except such as are warranted by our premisses. If, amidst all that is excellent and admirable in the external universe,

we see some manifest blemishes and deformities and evil tendencies, then the evidences of an all-wise contriver cease to be unmingled. If we find a great portion of calamity and acute anguish and vice in the world, if, as Addison says, "virtuous persons are very often unfortunate, and vicious persons prosperous," then so far the evidence of benevolent intention in the Author of the universe is diminished.

Let us, however, put aside this defect in the argument, and assume, with the advocates for a future state of retribution, that the admission of this state is necessary to the vindication of the moral attributes of the Deity. We see things in the present condition of man often going wrong, and for the sake of consistency we are obliged to assert a future state in which compensation will be made for present imperfections. We find the moral character of the Deity less complete and free from impeachment than we could have wished, and we institute the doctrine of a future state as an answer to the objections that otherwise might be made.

Here, then, we are at once supplied with a rule by which to measure what we shall judge and what we shall aver respecting a future state. All that which, being assumed, would place the moral attributes of God in a fairer point of view, and would show the Governor of the universe more benevolent and more just, is that which we are bound, by the principles of our hypothesis, to lay down and receive. That the well-intentioned and the

virtuous, who too often spend their days in this world in a state of unmerited suffering, who find their efforts to do good frustrated, and themselves made the objects of contempt and persecution, should obtain a compensation in a future world, is a doctrine highly gratifying to a well-principled mind to embrace. We have often occasion to deplore that the most honest and meritorious among the sons of men pass their lives in hopeless poverty, from which they in vain struggle to extricate themselves, perhaps are a prey to lingering disease, perhaps to sharp and long-enduring torments. Even what they suffer from the perverseness of their fellow-men we can scarcely avoid believing that an almighty Providence could have prevented. Men have had "trials and cruel mockings and scourgings, have been stoned and slain with the sword, have wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy." (Heb. ii. 36—38.)

When we admire the beauty and harmony of the universe, the wonderful adaptation of means to ends, the subtle and exquisite structure of the specimens of vegetable nature, the proportions and fitness of parts in animals, and the admirable composition of the human frame, we can scarcely do less than worship and adore the Being who has given birth to these wonders. We praise Him with our whole hearts, and congratulate ourselves, inasmuch as we make a part of so beautiful a

system. From all of this kind that we see, we infer the exuberant benevolence of the Author, and we feel the profoundest regret when we are compelled to observe certain phenomena which appear to contradict this inference.

The path, then, in which we should proceed in our delineation of a future 'state' seems to be plain. We take all that is best and most admirable in the world around us, and shape our idea of things to come in correspondence with it. We desire to indicate the goodness of God, and render His moral character complete, and therefore frame our conceptions of the future world so as that "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." (Isaiah xl. 4.) There is no need for the theory of a future state, except for the purpose of taking away every objection to the Divine benevolence, and rendering His attributes consistent and superior to impeachment.

It happens however, unfortunately, that many systems of religion, having first adapted the theory of a future state, place the character of the Deity in such a light as, instead of rendering it more amiable, and adapted to excite our most ardent affection, expose it to new difficulties, and render the whole system of governing the world of mankind less consistent with our ideas of perfect benevolence than they were as long as our views were confined to this sublunary condition of

existence. From the dictates of mere human reason, what we should have expected would have been that those who had suffered much here below, especially if their dispositions and their acts were conceived to be meritorious, would be recompensed by their being raised to a state of unmingled felicity beyond the grave. Whether the demerits of the wicked would be so atrocious, in some cases, as to impose on Divine benevolence the necessity of raising them from the dead that they might be punished for the "deeds done in the flesh," may be somewhat more doubtful.

But the Scriptures teach us a different doctrine. They affirm that mankind shall ultimately be divided into two classes, figuratively called "the sheep and the goats," and that in the day of judgment the wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." (Matt. xxv. 46.) And the distribution of the two classes is not less distinctly marked than their final destination. For we are told that "wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat;" while, on the other hand, "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. vii. 13, 14.) The Apostle Paul concludes "both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;" and he goes on to say that "they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good,

no, not one : . . . that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. iii. 9, ff.) And St. Peter proposes the appalling question, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter iv. 18.) Jesus Christ says, "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool! shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. v. 22); and elsewhere, "For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." (Matt. xii. 36.) And all prospect of a reversion of this judgment is expressly taken off. Part of the sentence is, "Let him that is filthy be filthy still, and let him that is holy be-holy still." (Rev. xxii. 11.) And Christ speaks of hell as the "fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark ix. 43, 44); and one of his apostles affirms that the "smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." (Rev. xiv. 11.)

Now, whatever we ought to think of these awful denunciations in other respects, certain it is they have little tendency to clear up any objections which, from what we see of things in this world, we might think ourselves entitled to urge against the unquestionableness of the Divine benevolence. Man is subject on this earth to many calamities, to which, on the hypothesis of a beneficent Creator, we find it difficult to reconcile ourselves. We looked for a God that should "wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isaiah xxv. 8), and a

state where there should "be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying: neither" should "there be any more pain" (Rev. xxi. 4); and, instead of this, we are presented with a master, strict to mark, and severe to punish, our most trifling deviations: so that "in His sight shall no man living be justified." (Psalm cxliii. 2.) We hear indeed perpetually of a God, "gracious and long-suffering, . . . keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (Exodus xxxiv. 6, 7.) We read that God "loved us, and He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John iv. 10.) But this does not much mend the matter; since no man can come to Christ to partake of his salvation unless he is purified from his sins. Unless we be "converted and become as little children, we shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. xviii. 3.) We must "be of God, and have overcome the world." "Except we be born again, born of the water and the spirit, we cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John iii. 5.) The true Christian, who alone shall receive the gift of everlasting life, is "not of the world, but Christ has chosen him out of the world." (John xv. 19.) Jesus therefore expressly addresses his chosen as a "little flock," to whom it is his "Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom." (Luke xii. 32.) "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. vi. 9.) The mass of mankind are "those that are without," of whom it is significantly pronounced that "God judgeth."

(1 Cor. v. 13.) It is therefore sufficiently plain that, in the final division of the "sheep and the goats" at the last day—the latter, which "shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matt. xxv. 46), embraces an infinite majority of mankind.

Now certainly this view of things has but little tendency to clear up the difficulties of the Divine administration, to explain the evils that occur to us in our survey of the world, and to balance the striking inequalities that we find in the fortunes of mankind.

One of the grossest that present themselves to our observation, is the unequal distribution of the good things of this life, where, particularly in civilized communities, a few are born to the inheritance of every accommodation and luxury, while the great majority spend their lives amidst perpetual privations. They are denied the cultivation of the mind, and consigned to unceasing brutality and ignorance. Unremitting labour is their constant lot, and with it they can scarcely purchase the common necessities of life. Nature, without our being able to accuse them of the smallest depravity, prompts them to the propagation of their species; and too often to them and their offspring existence is a burthen grievous to be borne. While they are in health and strength, it cannot be expected that they can do more than scantily provide for the wants of themselves and their families; and when sickness or any grievous calamity overtakes them, they are

no longer capable of this. They can gratify none of those choicer appetites with which nature has furnished the poor no less than the rich. They have nothing that is worth the name of relaxation and holiday. The heavens perpetually frown on them; while for the rich the sky is gay, and the world is clothed in flowers. God makes indeed "His sun to rise and His rain to descend" (Matt. v. 45)* equally on all; but men must have leisure, be free from the perpetual demands of labour, and arrive at a period of serenity and calm, before they can truly savour and relish the beauties of nature. To the poor and the wretched the landscape of the earth will always be deprived of its more brilliant colours. They care no more for the scenes that would ravish with delight the eye of a Rubens or a Claude, than the hawk does for the plumage of the bird that is his destined prey. And in like manner the faculties of the mind which are imparted indiscriminately to all classes, and in greater abundance than the supercilious and disdainful are willing to allow, are imparted in a great majority of instances in vain. The capabilities of a subtle understanding, of a profound logic, of a comprehensive view of all that we see, and all that we are qualified to conceive—the brilliant hues of the imagination, the prismatic power by which we are enabled to dissect its rays, and the faculty by which we can again combine them in endless variety—are destined for ever to remain uncultivated and unexplored. The life of the

poor man is little else than one scene of dulness and ignorance, scarcely varied, except when he arrives at epochs of calamity, when the uniformity is temporarily suspended by griefs almost beyond the strength of human nature to endure.

Jesus Christ, indeed, relates a soothing tale of "a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate and desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table," and informs us that "it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried, and in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." (Luke xvi. 19, ff.)

But it unfortunately happens that it is not every poor man that by his virtues can lay a certain claim to a distinguished place in the world to come. On the contrary, poverty is an unfavourable soil for high moral qualities to spring up and spread their branches to the air. Necessity is too often the parent of crime. Severe want and destitution are apt to relax the bonds which the laws of civil communities, and even the moral principles of our social existence, imperiously prescribe to a member of the commonweal. The poor man is disposed, like the wretch in Shakspeare, when "sharp misery has worn him to the bones," when

“The world is not his friend, nor the world’s law ;
The world affords no law to make him rich ;”

to determine not to be poor, but to break through the limits by which it is attempted to restrain him.

And, what is worst, it is the mighty power of circumstances that compels him to this moral degradation, and renders him deaf to the calls of honesty and benevolence. Many a man, if he had been sheltered from childhood from the bleak winds of adversity, and mild and enlivening gales had played on his brow, would have afforded an example of truth and generosity and honour, who now from the stress of temptation has sunk into meanness and lying and robbery and outrage.

Would it not, therefore, rather have been expected from a system of rétribution, and that proposed to itself to repair the irregularities of this transitory state, that he who was placed in an after-condition of existence would by gentle and emollient methods arrive at the healing of those wounds which the hardness of his lot here had inflicted on him ? It is plain that he had not been allowed a fair chance in the scenes of mortal life. No philosopher, no careful observer of the qualities of the human mind, will deny that every man has the seeds of some good in him which favourable circumstances might have ripened into a crop of no contemptible virtues. It is the province of an enlightened and humane tutor to watch everything that promises well in his pupil, to check by quiet and unperceived methods the first

appearances of ill tendency, and to encourage by every generous attention the tokens of rectitude and honour. This world certainly affords no such school to the majority of its inhabitants. But the life of man "is but a span;" we "come forth like a flower;" we are "like grass which groweth up: in the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth." (Psalm xc. 5, 6.) There is surely, therefore, time in the countless ages of eternity to rectify every obliquity. The faults of our nonage may be obliterated, and be as though they had never been. We may well apply in this case the similitude of the prophet Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will not" (Isaiah xlix. 15) the Creator forget the creature He has made.

And, beside the general evils of poverty and its inseparable attendants, things will often occur to aggravate the mischief, and even to involve in durable misery those whom poverty has spared. Such are oppression, and tyranny, and unjust judgment, and its consequences, torture and an ignominious death. Let us plunge into the depth of dungeons, and observe youth, and patriotism, and talents, and virtue, pining for years in hopeless oblivion. Such are the "thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." Such are

"All maladies
Of ghastly spasm, or racking torture, qualms

Of heart-sick agony, all feverous kinds,
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,
Intestine stone and ulcer, colic pangs,
Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy
And moonstruck madness, pining atrophy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence,
Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums."

Many are the persons who through their whole lives have been the victims of these infirmities. Let us recollect the calamities of fire and tempest, of wide-wasting pestilence, and earthquakes that have swallowed up whole cities with their inhabitants. Let us recollect the horrors of war, that last invention of deliberate profligacy for the misery of man. Let us think of the variety of wounds, the multiplication of anguish, the desolation of countries, towns destroyed, harvests flaming, inhabitants by thousands perishing of hunger and cold.

In reality, the majority of mankind spend the principal portion of their lives in a state, if not of suffering, at least of grievous privations ; and if the expectation of a state of future retribution is justified upon the conception of vindicating and asserting the entire benevolence of the Deity, we ought to believe that all who have suffered considerably in this mortal life shall have their sufferings compensated in the life to come. Nor is it necessary to this end that they should have been eminently virtuous, and in ordinary language "worthy of the kingdom of heaven." On that supposition the persons would be comparatively few that would be benefited by the future retribution. But we must consider that men are

for the most part what the circumstances under which they were placed have made them. How many are the persons who could safely aver, "If my lot had cast me in the situation of this frail, erring, or guilty man, I should have come out from the fierce trials he sustained more whole and undamaged than he?" It would seem, therefore, by no means equitable and right, that he whose lot was unfortunate and severe, should not only suffer the sharp miseries to which his lot exposed him, and sustain the scars and maims that followed upon his character and habits, but beside this should be subjected in a future world to punishment for those errors which, under all the circumstances, it was impossible for him to avoid.

To judge justly of mankind, and the merits and demerits of the individuals of the human race, we cannot do better than look through the ranks of society as it is at present constituted. And here I will take leave to borrow a page or two from what I wrote and have published for a different purpose.*

"One of the most obvious views which are presented to us by man in society, is the inoffensiveness and innocence which ordinarily characterize him.

"Society for the greater part carries on its own organization. Each man pursues his proper occupation; and there are few individuals that feel the propensity to

* "Thoughts on Man," Essay vi. London, 1831.

interrupt the pursuits of their neighbours by personal violence. When we observe the quiet manner in which the inhabitants of a great city, and, in the country, the frequenters of the fields, the highroads, and the heaths, pass along, each engrossed by his private contemplations, feeling no disposition to molest the strangers he encounters, but, on the contrary, prepared to afford them every courteous assistance, we cannot in equity do less than admire the innocence of our species, and fancy that, like the patriarchs of old, we have fallen in with 'angels unawares.'

"There are a few men in every community that are sons of riot and plunder, and for the sake of these the satirical and censorious throw a general slur and aspersion upon the whole species.

"When we look at human society with kind and complacent survey, we are more than half tempted to imagine that men might subsist very well in clusters and congregated bodies without the coercion of law, and in truth criminal laws were only made to prevent the ill-disposed few from interrupting the regular and inoffensive proceedings of the vast majority."

Let us divide this spacious earth into equal compartments, and see in which violence and in which tranquillity prevails. Let us look through the various ranks and occupations of human society, and endeavour to arrive at a conclusion of a similar sort. The soldier by occupation, and the officer who commands him,

would seem when they are employed in their express functions to be men of strife. Kings and ministers of state have in a multitude of instances fallen under this description.

But these are but a small part of the tenantry of the many-peopled globe. Man lives by the sweat of his brow. The teeming earth is given him, that by his labour he may raise from it the means of his subsistence. Agriculture is, among civilized nations, the first, and certainly the most indispensable of professions. The profession itself is the emblem of peace. All its occupations, from seedtime to harvest, are tranquil, and there is nothing which belongs to it that can obviously be applied to rouse the angry passions, and place men in a frame of hostility to each other. Next to the cultivator come the manufacturer, the artificer, the carpenter, the mason, the joiner, the cabinet-maker,—all those numerous classes of persons who are employed in forming garments for us to wear, houses to live in, and movables and instruments for the accommodation of the species. All these persons are of necessity of a peaceable demeanour. So are those who are not employed in producing the conveniences of life, but in conducting the affairs of barter and exchange. Add to these such as are engaged in literature, either in the study of what has already been produced, or in adding to the stock, in science or the liberal arts, in the instructing mankind in religion, and their duties, or in the education of youth. “Civility,”

“civil,” are indeed terms which express a state of peaceable occupation, in opposition to what is military, and imply a tranquil frame of mind, and the absence of contention, uproar, and violence. It is therefore clear that the majority of mankind are civil, devoted to the arts of peace, and, so far as relates to acts of violence, innocent, and that the sons of rapine constitute the exception to the general character.

It is through the effect of the necessity of labour that civilized communities become what they are. We all fall into our ranks. Each one is the member of a certain company or squadron. We know our respective places, and are marshalled and disciplined with an exactness scarcely less than that of the individuals of a mighty army. We are therefore little disposed to interrupt the occupations of each other. We are intent upon the peculiar employment to which we have become devoted. We rise up early, and lie down late, and have no leisure to trouble ourselves with the pursuits of others. Hence of necessity it happens in a civilized community that a vast majority of the species are innocent, and have no inclination to molest or interrupt each other's avocations.

It is, in reality, sufficiently clear, that if the existence of mankind in a future state has relation to their merits and demerits only, it is but a very small part of the human race that can be found worthy of being raised from the dead, either to receive the reward of their good

deeds, or to be punished for such as are evil, especially if the retribution, agreeably to the Christian doctrine, is to consist in being made partakers of the joys of heaven, and admitted to the beatific vision of God, or being cast down into hell. And it would exceedingly lessen the difficulties of the subject, especially as to the future state of the wicked, if we were to suppose a very small number of persons, and those only of enormous offenders, such as Caligula and Nero, and men guilty of atrocious murders and cruelty, to be brought up for judgment. But the Scripture doctrine is especially in contradiction to this. It is said that Christ is "he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." (Acts x. 42.) And again, "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John v. 29.)

And, as if the writers of the New Testament were sensible that this was a hard saying, they undertake to quiet all murmurs and repining by exclaiming, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Romans ix. 20, 21.)

And, in a similar manner, Pope, in his *Essay on Man*, after having spoken of the passive docility of the untutored Indian, proceeds—

“Go, wiser thou ! and, in thy scale of sense,
Weigh thy opinion against Providence ;
Call imperfection what thou fancy’st such ;
Say, here he gives too little, there too much.

* * * * *

Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Re-judge his justice, be the God of God.”

But in this there lurks the well-known logical fallacy of arguing against the use of a thing from the abuse of it. Undoubtedly we ought to be diffident of our judgments. If I stood in the presence of a Bacon, a Solon, or a Socrates, I ought, no doubt, to feel a deep deference for their superior attainments, but not such as altogether to supersede the exercise of my own understanding. And infinitely more, when I undertake to scan the ways of Providence, and to judge of the dispensations of a Being to whom we ascribe infinite wisdom, I ought to be deeply sensible of the narrowness of my views, the little that I can see,—I ought to recollect how different my judgment would perhaps be if

“Of this frame the bearing of the ties,
The strong connections, nice dependencies,
Gradations just,”

my mind was capable of comprehending the whole.

But, such as my faculties may happen to be, I have

devolved upon me as a rational being the duty and the right of exercising my own understanding upon questions that involve my own interest, and the feelings, the pleasure or pain, of the other dwellers upon the earth that we inhabit. With infinite deference, with a firm and manly humility, I am entitled to judge of the happiness or misery that falls upon or awaits me. It would be too much to require of the unhappy wretch who is compelled to perpetual exile from the realms of bliss, that he should not venture to form an opinion of the sentence he has received.

In reality, the very terms of justice and equity imply a reference to the powers of the human understanding to decide upon the soundness of their application. We may determine, if we please, that the counsels of the Creator of the world cannot be apprehended by the understanding of man. But then it will follow that it is a mere abuse of terms to ascribe moral qualities to God. We deprive Him at once of the ascription of either benevolence or iniquity in the sense in which we are able to apprehend them. If we cannot impute blame, neither can we attribute praise to what He does. What we hold to be benevolence may for what we know be the very contrary; or rather the thing is altogether out of our jurisdiction, and we cannot do better than pass no judgment, either of good or ill, upon what we see, or what is imparted to us.

We will now proceed to the last particular in the

doctrine of final retribution, which is the infliction of future punishment.

Punishment is unquestionably awarded against him who offends, either for his own advantage, or the advantage of others. I can conceive no other just reason for its being called into act.

Punishment, if awarded for the advantage of the offender, is intended either to enlighten his understanding, or to impress more emphatically upon his recollection the important truths which his passions have impelled him to overlook. But punishment, the infliction of pain, is not the legitimate and fitting mode of enlightening the understanding. It is in reality the refuge and the confession of the weakness and incompetence of the teacher. If he were capable of clearly instructing the person against whom it is exercised, he would not have recourse to lashes and blows. The schoolmaster becomes impatient, is dissatisfied with himself, and finding he does not make the progress he desired by the most proper and rational modes, proceeds to the application of force.

But the advantage of the offender is totally out of the question according to the received ideas of a future world. By the doctrine of Christianity, the award pronounced at the day of judgment is final and complete, the delinquent is declared incorrigible, and his doom is fixed for ever.

The next purpose of punishment, according to the

deductions of the human understanding, is the advantage of others, or, in the received language of jurisprudence, it is called into action for the sake of example.

And here, in the first place, the same objection applies as under the former head,—it is the resort of impotence. An almighty and omniscient instructor can surely enlighten the understandings of its subjects by means more appropriate and congenial than the application of what we may call brute force. The exhibition of intellectual evidence is the more fitting and noble way of correcting our misconceptions, and not the exhibition of a scene.

But further we may ask, who is to be benefited by the example of the punishments of a future world? Not those against whom the award of future judgment has already been pronounced; for their doom is final, and they are declared incapable of amendment. Not certainly the saints in heaven; for they are advanced far beyond the applicableness of such gross instruction, and must not be supposed capable of such falling off as has been already exemplified in the damned in hell. And other spectators than these two, are excluded by the very idea of a general resurrection and a future state.

A sentiment, therefore, has been adopted of vengeance, and the inexpressible displeasure of God against sin. God is a being of such infinite purity, that He feels the deformity of guilt in a way of which it is

impossible for us to form a conception. He has placed us here, it is said, in a state of probation; and we, having failed of what was justly required of us, are fully exposed to the "wrath to come." It is surely, however, a most repulsive way of demonstrating the purity of God, to make it the source of infinite and endless misery to His creatures. Not to add that many things might be recollected, from the early part of this Essay, which should lead us to doubt whether the state of man on earth is exactly entitled to the name of a state of probation for a future world.

It is further to be considered that there are two parties concerned in this question of a future judgment—the offended and the offender. And, if God be a being of immaculate purity, yet, as the Psalmist says, "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust; the wind passeth over it, and we are gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." (Psalm ciii. 14—16.) The great Roman satirist has undertaken to prove that "all men are mad." And, certainly, if we are not mad, we are for the most part fools and imbecile. Let us turn our attention to the dull, the thoughtless, and the ignorant—men whose lives pass away like a dream. It is surely too much to say, that these are worthy of everlasting torments; or, according to the reading of those who are shocked with the enormity of this doctrine, of a punishment to endure for ages of ages, and then to be succeeded by final annihila-

tion. We are worms—creatures that float for a brief period in the element, and then perish ; and can by no possibility appear otherwise in the eye of Him who looks through all things ; who “sees worlds on worlds compose one universe, and observes how system into system runs.” It is vanity, and the folly of enormous self-conceit alone, however perverse in its application, that could ever have led us to conclude that our follies and perverseness, putting out of the question the very few that have defiled themselves with vast and inconceivable guilt, could have merited dreadful and lasting punishments in a future world.

The mind of man is unavoidably led to anticipate the particulars of the Great Day, the outline of which is in a great degree given in the Scriptures. It is styled the “great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (Malachi iv. 5.) We “shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory ; and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. . . Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but the Father only.” (Matt. xxiv. 30, ff.) “Behold he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him . . . and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” (Rev. i. 7.) Meanwhile, it is reasonable to consider these matters, as in a certain degree thus expressed,

in accommodation to our grosser and more imperfect apprehensions.

It is however more necessary to attend with exactness to what we are told of the essential transactions of that day. St. Paul speaks of it as the "day, when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." And again, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." (1 Cor. iv. 5.) And Christ himself says, "that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. xii. 36.) Now, if we were to understand this literally, and represent it after the manner of men, the great day would be a day to which it would be scarcely possible to conceive an end.

We may however bear in mind that "the judge of all the earth" is considered as being endowed with infallibility, and that he sees the truth of things in a light clearer than that of the day, and without the possibility of a just ground of exception or appeal. But if we were to carry this notion into its most rigorous consequences, we should take away the representation of a day of judgment altogether. "The general assembly and church of the first-born" (Heb. xii. 23), is supposed to be brought together, that all might know, and "confess" the justice of the final award. In pursuance of this idea, it will be requisite that the demerits of every

man should be made public. And a part of the awfulness of the day, according to our conceptions, consists in this, that the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, that "every mouth shall be stopped" (Rom. iii. 19), and that the guilt of all be manifest. It is true that many of the forms of a human court of justice may be dispensed with, and that all obscurity and apprehension of error may be supposed to be out of the question. At first, indeed, we might be somewhat revolted at the absoluteness, the omnipotence, and perhaps we may add the summariness of the decree; but all this is greatly mitigated by the heartfelt conviction of him against whom the sentence is awarded, and the entire consciousness of the whole assembly, that due consideration has been had and proclaimed of all the circumstances upon which the decision depended. And yet, on the other hand, this scarcely seems compatible with the grand division of "the sheep and the goats," and the canon that "all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John vi. 29.) In reality, the practicability of such a judgment must appear to our conceptions to be utterly impossible, full of confusion, and the most palpable incompatibilities. Meanwhile, there is certainly very little need of a nice discrimination, if, as we are told, there are but two fates reserved for all mankind. Cases have been

recorded, where a great number of persons accused have been given in charge to one jury, to be disposed of by one sweeping verdict. But what is this compared with what is announced to us of the judgment of the last day! It was thus in the creed of the ancient heathen. And the same is continued with still greater emphasis in the code of the Christian faith. When the joys of heaven and the pains of hell come to be described, it is plain that "there is a great gulf fixed between" them. (Luke xvi. 26.) And it is thus that Jesus Christ says, "It is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." (Matt. v. 29.) And finally he sums up his account of the last judgment, "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all nations shall be gathered before him," by saying that all men "shall be set on his right hand and on his left, and that he shall say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; but to them on the left, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. xxv. 31, ff.)

To render the state of the condemned still more horrible, brimstone is added to fire, it being supposed to enhance the sufferings of those already consigned to devouring flames. Thus in the book of the Revelation it is written, "The fearful, and unbelieving, and

abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone."

(Rev. xxi. 8.) And again: "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."

(Rev. xiv. 9, 10.) And farther on: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Rev. xx. 10.)

ESSAY II.

*ON THE PRESENT LIFE OF MAN CONSIDERED AS A
STATE OF PROBATION FOR A FUTURE WORLD.*



ESSAY II.

On the Present Life of Man Considered as a State of Probation for a Future World.

THE idea of our present existence being a state of probation, is an inevitable corollary from the notion of a future world being a state of retribution. If man is to be raised from the dead, that "every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. v. 10), it follows that God placed us in this world, in the way of trial, to ascertain by our deeds here what sort of censure or reward we might be entitled to hereafter.

A further notion inseparable from that of this world being a state of probation, is that the lot of every man will after death be made final, and that, pursuant to his demeanour in this sublunary state, his condition for happiness or otherwise, will be fixed to all eternity. The life of man is of various dimensions: some live one hundred, some ninety, down to twenty, ten, and five years. I do not know that any one has pretended to

ascertain at how early an age a human being must be cut off by death in order to exempt him from being made amenable to the judgment of the last day.

Now at first sight it would appear unequal, and in so far unjust, to subject a trial of such very different degrees of length to the same result. In human affairs, when a man is put to the test for the purpose of determining in what manner he shall be remunerated, promoted, or the contrary, it is most usual to appoint a specific period of probation, according to his behaviour, in which his subsequent treatment shall be determined.

In reality, the longest life would seem an insufficient period in which to decide the condition of a sensitive and reasoning creature for all the ages of eternity. The old poet sings, "The longest life is a summer's day." Narrow as is our insight into the truth of things as they must be seen by the eye of God, it is most usual to pronounce that man upon earth "fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not." (Job xiv. 2.) To a schoolboy, the days of his pupilage appear as if they would last for ever, and that by themselves they constituted a life. But as he advances to forty, fifty, and fourscore years, they seem perpetually to vanish in the distance ; and it is but now and then, as accident presents itself, that they are recollected. What must it be, then, to him that lives centuries upon centuries ? They must be felt like a dream, which was never substantial and solid. It would be a most flimsy and inadequate com-

parison if we were to suppose a youth introduced into the walls of a college, or place of restraint, and accordingly as he acquitted himself the first day, to be treated and disposed of from that time to the period of decrepitude.

God, who undoubtedly "calletth those things which be not, as though they were" (Rom. iv. 17), and must be supposed to be endowed with the power attributed by Shakspeare to his witches, of "looking into the seeds of time, and saying which grain will grow and which will not," cannot be conceived to stand in need of a period of probation to enable him to ascertain among human beings which is fitted to partake of the enjoyments of the heavenly state, and which is disqualified and worthy of perpetual exile. I know not therefore precisely for what end a state of probation is assigned us, whether for the sake of the spectators that shall be present at the last day, or for the conviction of the mind of the individual who is brought to his trial, that every mouth may be stopped, and each be fully impressed with a sense of the justice of the sentence that is passed upon him.

This idea of a state of probation implies the passing in review the actions by which the history of a man has been characterised during his course through this mortal stage of existence. But here we are bound to consider the various fortunes to which we are indebted for the good or the evil which has marked our progress through

life. Many a man has passed his days creditably and in honour, merely because he was never brought to the fiery ordeal of temptation. His life has been unspotted, for it has proceeded for ever in shelter from the withering beams of an all-penetrating heat. He has held an even tenor of existence, blessed for ever with moderate warmth and refreshing breezes. Life is in reality like a voyage at sea: the weather may be perpetually calm and serene, or it may be marked with tempests and hurricanes which scarcely any power is competent to resist.

Let the same man, with the very same original qualities, be exposed to all the force of temptation, and what will be the result? Let the temptation be of all the delicacies that can pamper the appetite, of the most delicious wines, of all under the name of love and beauty that can most intoxicate the sense, or touch the most susceptible feelings of the heart. Let luxury invite with all its splendours, or that most captivates our admiration and our taste; or let power and sway present themselves with whatever can fascinate our ambition. How rarely is the man to be met with who will not find his integrity and singleness of heart grievously shaken, or utterly giving way under one or other of these?

Marmontel has entitled one of his moral Tales, *Heureusement* (in the English translation, "By Good Luck"), in which he undertakes to exhibit a lady, who is again and again upon the point of forfeiting her

character for chastity, but by the merest accident in the world preserving it in the most imminent crisis of her danger. And the same thing may occur in the case of every temptation incident to a human creature of either sex. And yet how is the man that has fortuitously been saved from a condition of great moral peril more worthy than he who, as we phrase it, has been "deserted of his better angel," entrapped in the snare that was prepared for him?

God, it may be said, knows the thoughts of a man, and will judge him accordingly. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matt v. 28.) But this is not all. It is the first step in the career of vice that often determines a man's character for ever. He that is yet a stranger to the smallest degree of turpitude, stands on the brink, and hesitates and blushes. But when he has plunged in, too often he is lost for ever. He goes on from bad to worse; he becomes familiar with profligacy, perhaps with blood. He grows hardened and laughs at his former self, that he should have boggled at what now appears to him so neutral and so trifling. Shakespeare has exhibited this in the most masterly way in his tragedy of *Macbeth*. Macbeth is "full of the milk of human kindness." He is "not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it." He had "bought golden opinions from all sorts of people, which would be worn now in their newest gloss."

But presently he becomes a murderer under circumstances of the greatest aggravation. He finds himself "in blood stepped in so far returning were as tedious as go o'er;" and decides,

"But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams,
That shake us nightly."

Now let us suppose a man tempted even as Macbeth was tempted; but he resists the first suggestion of evil: or, it may be, fortuitous circumstances, entirely independent of himself, call away his thoughts from the pernicious train that had at first whispered him. He has the same good and honourable dispositions that Macbeth originally had; the series of his fortunes aids these dispositions; and he passes a life as exemplary and illustrious, as that of Macbeth was branded for suspicion, remorselessness, and cruelty. It is impossible to conceive these two persons falling under the same sentence in a future world. It is therefore not true that we can be judged by an equitable judge hereafter by our thoughts only.

No maxim can be more common, at the same time that no maxim can be more irrefragable, than that man is to a great degree the creature of the circumstances in which he is placed. It ought, therefore, in a certain sense, to be the circumstances, and not the man, that should be called up into judgment.

A question that is entitled to mature consideration under this head, arises out of the opposite theories respecting human action, either of free will, or of moral necessity. If the doctrine of necessity be true, so that no man under the same circumstances can act otherwise than he does act, this would seem to free us from all accountableness or absolute demerit, whatever may be the history of our lives or the progress of our actions. It is thus that the necessarian reasons in his closet. No sooner, however, does he come into active life, and the intercourse of his fellow-men, than all these fine-drawn speculations vanish from his recollection. He regards himself and other men as beings endowed with liberty of action, as possessed of a proper initiative power, and free to do a thing or not to do it, without being subject to the absolute and irresistible constraint of motives. It is from this internal and indefeasible sense of liberty that we draw all our moral energies and enthusiasm, that we persevere heroically, in defiance of obstacles and discouragements, that we praise and blame the actions of others, and admire the elevated virtues of the best of our contemporaries, and of those whose achievements adorn the page of history.

Let us then omit these abstruser speculations, and regard only those views of the state of man which are free from all manner of dispute.

In the first place, it cannot be denied that we come into the world with tempers and dispositions exceedingly

different from each other. Some men seem born to love, and others to hate. Some men are of a gay and complacent nature, viewing all things under the most agreeable aspect ; and others see everything in black, and seem to have a curtain or film before their eyes, by means of which they view everything distorted, turning all the persons around them into so many demons, odious to the eye, and noxious and baleful in their propensities. Some are of an equable and kindly temper, whom scarcely anything can deprive of their self-command ; and others are of a violent and furious constitution, whom hardly anything can preserve from frightful excesses. It must surely be unjust to dispose of the fates of these men to all eternity for happiness or misery, in consequence of dispositions they inherited before they first drew vital air on the surface of the earth.

From the force of natural disposition let us proceed to consider the power of circumstances to render a man such as he is, and no otherwise.

The temptations which this world holds forth, in a great degree consist of riches and poverty—of luxury and indulgence on the one hand, and of severe privations and want on the other. It has been disputed whether prosperity or adversity administer the sharpest ordeal to human virtue. It is certain that the middle course is safest, where a man shall have a moderate supply of the good things of this life, without greatly

taxing his industry to procure them. Meanwhile, ease itself is not without its disadvantages. We require a strong stimulus either of circumstances or ambition, or else we shall never have awakened in us half the energies and half the virtue of which we are capable. Man is for the most part of an indolent disposition. The seeds of good require to be tended and manured, and to have often a fresh supply of soil and water, or we shall have at last a starved and sterile crop.

The prayer of Agur in the Bible is dictated by a sound knowledge of the human mind: "Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." (Prov. xxx. 8, 9.)

In the torrid zone of luxury and temptation, where is the man that shall remain unscathed? The assaults of luxury emasculate the mind, unstring the nerves, and render us incapable of a strenuous resistance. Where they present themselves in force, not one man in ten thousand will come off unshorn of his purity and honour. Who is there that is proof against the allurements of power and flattery, and the tide of a perpetual prosperity? Shall he not forget himself, and be hurried along with the torrent? It scarcely matters how innocent, how honest, how firm of soul the man originally was: the soil shall be loosened under him, and he shall be carried away as with a crush of the elements.

On the other hand, the temptations of poverty are perhaps still more hardly to be overcome. The mind shall be originally stored with good resolutions, and the education of the child may have been decidedly virtuous. But the unavoidable demands of our nature will scarcely be baffled. Hunger and nakedness, when they come in their most terrific form, will in a manner compel a man to steal, and, however piously trained, to murmur against the dispensations of Providence. When a man has once thoroughly felt the sharp bitings of want, and has looked out upon despair, will he be always proof against the impulse to lie, to fawn, to play the hypocrite, to wander into forbidden paths, and, like Esau, to sell his heavenly birthright for a morsel of meat? He has, it may be, persisted long in a good course, but has reaped no fruit from his abstinence. The world still frowns upon him, and no perseverance in what is right in any degree diminishes the rigour of his fate. At length in desperation he gives up the struggle, and becomes convinced that virtue is no longer the care of Providence, and that justice is banished from the earth. In bitterness of soul he deserts the standard of integrity, and resolves to provide for himself, by whatever means, a less rigorous fate.

Thus it is that in a vast majority of cases circumstances make the man good or ill, as they shall decide. Is it just, then, that men should be punished hereafter because their lot in life was unfavourable to their moral character,

while others, purely inasmuch as their fortune was propitious here, shall be crowned with the favour of God and the joys of heaven to all eternity? The lot of a great proportion of human creatures is miserable here, and, purely because of the fierce pressure of their misery, they become vicious. What equity can we discern in their being made for ever miserable hereafter, because it was their fate to be miserable in this transitory state?

In the courts of human policy here below, let us grant that it may be necessary to punish men, without nicely advertng to the irresistibleness of their temptations, or the unfavourableness of the circumstances that in a manner necessitated their fall. In many of the punishments awarded in this sublunary state, reformation of the offender may be one of the objects taken into view, and the presumed necessity in some cases to punish him for the sake of example to others, may seem to justify the harsh treatment he receives. But, as appeared in the preceding Essay, neither of these considerations applies to the end of the world and the day of judgment. There can be no reformation, for the sentence is final; and there can be no use in example, for the saints in heaven are infinitely above its influence, and the damned in hell can reap no benefit from it. It seems, therefore, to rest on no basis but the idea of vengeance.

One of the soundest principles of human law on the subject of crimes and punishments, is that law should in as rare instances as possible interfere with the discretion

of individuals. Laws should be as few as they can practicably be made, forbidding nothing, the indulgence of which would not, beyond question, be injurious to the common weal. The right of private judgment in everything beyond this should be sacred. The independence of every man in all things, except where prohibition is required for the general safety, is indispensably necessary for the improvement of a rational nature. We are bound by our duty as citizens to conform to all good laws; and having taken care of this, it is the pride and the confidence of an honest nature that bids us say, All else is intrusted to my discretion, to be decided on in the full liberty of the reflections and deductions of my own mind.

Now let us see how all this stands upon the received doctrine of a state of probation. Here a man is made the veriest slave that can possibly be imagined. The law is about our paths and about our beds. By day or by night, in light or in darkness, an all-seeing eye pursues us. "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." (Ps. cxxxix. 7, ff.) And what is the result? "For

every idle word" we shall be called to account. If thoughtlessly I "say to my brother, Thou fool, I shall be in danger." And my very "looks" shall be scanned.

"All this," we might think, "might be in a merciful spirit:" God would not be strict to mark, or severe to punish. But how says the Scripture? All mankind will be divided that day into two bodies; and all shall hear the sentence, "Come, ye blessed," or "Depart, ye cursed." (Matt. xxv. 30, ff.).

Man, then, by this doctrine, is in the completest state of slavery that can be imagined; and all the ills that grow out of slavery are copiously entailed upon us. It would so break our spirit, that it would be next to impossible that we should exist under it; but that, fortunately, amidst the busy scenes and the various excitements of this world, amidst the intoxication of luxury to the rich, and the perpetual calls for labour and industry to the bulk of mankind, the recollection of the rod of iron under whose sway we conceive ourselves to be placed, fades from our thoughts, and that, as was said before, we do not truly believe the creed which with our lips we profess. But, in spite of this facility, which could alone render life endurable, the effect of these dogmas upon our conduct and system of existence is truly surprising. We are taught to think that we live beneath the perpetual vigilance of an inexorable Judge. Under mortal tyrants mankind have passed their days in a constant terror of spies and informers. They dared

not utter their thoughts before a stranger, lest they should be reported, and so made subject to the most fatal consequences. Nay, to so great a height has the alarm sometimes attained, that they dared not speak their sentiments to their most seemingly confidential friend, lest that friend might prove false, and betray them.

It is reported by the ancients of Dionysius, the tyrant, that he caused a cavern in a rock to be so constructed as to have an exact resemblance to the form of the human ear. The words uttered by any one at the bottom of this dungeon were distinctly conveyed to an aperture in the roof, and the tyrant sat in a secret chamber, where he could hear all that was said by the unfortunate prisoners below. To this dungeon he caused to be committed all those of whom he entertained a suspicion. He then betook himself to his solitary retreat, and listened; and, according to the tenor of the conversation he overheard, he acquitted or condemned the persons whom he had previously apprehended. This contrivance obtained the appellation of "Dionysius's ear."

Solomon has expressed this idea in a manner peculiarly impressive: "Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." (Eccles. x. 20.)

But, according to the Christian doctrine, we are subject to an inspection still more fearful than this. When

Solomon said, "Curse not the king; no, not in thy thought," he was conscious that he was guilty of exaggeration. As long as a man offends in thought only, he is safe from all the spies and surveillance that human ingenuity can invent. But it is not so with omniscience. "God knoweth the secrets of the heart." (Ps. xliv. 21.) "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" (Ps. xciv. 9.)

In reality, the declaration of this unlimited inspection compensates in a great degree in its effects for the doubtful credence, nay, almost for the unbelief, with which the declaration is received. Few are the unbelievers so staunch that will not say, "After all, may not this be true? And then, Am I not playing a dangerous game, if I act as if I were secure of impunity?" "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." (Exodus xx. 7.) We dare not trust ourselves with our own thoughts. "The devils also," we are told, "believe and tremble." (James ii. 19.) Pitiable as is their state, they dread lest it should be made worse. "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" (Rom. ix. 20.) "Man is but a worm, and the son of man is a worm." (Job xxv. 6.) "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb. x. 31.) "Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isaiah xxxiii. 14.)

In consequence of this state of things, the majority of men in a Christian country dare not trust themselves

with their own understandings. They do not exactly believe. But seeing the professed creed of their ancestors for many generations, remembering the lessons and the prayers they were taught to repeat before their lips could clearly articulate the sounds, seeing the thousands of churches that have been built, the vast establishments that have been settled, the numerous train of clergy that have been spread over the earth, they think it a safer course to submit themselves in silence to the religion of their birth.

It has sufficiently appeared that, in the plain and unequivocal language of the Christian Scriptures, all men are born to be eternally happy or miserable ; that if the happiness of the righteous will be unspeakably great, so also will be the misery of the rest of the species, and that the partakers of heavenly joys will be a little flock, while the exiles, those who are destined to be everlasting monuments of the Divine wrath, will be, with comparatively very few exceptions, the whole race of mankind. Let us add to this, that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they must give an account," that even their "looks" shall be brought forward as witnesses against them, and that the "secrets of all hearts shall be laid open at the last day," while, except the especial favourites of the Judge, there is but one sentence against all that remain. To say all, then, in a word, since it must finally be told, The God of the Christians is a tyrant.

And yet this creed has been delivered from age to age, and outwardly embraced by the bulk of mankind in this western world. In the dark ages, when the art of reading and writing were scarcely known, and so many nations were the victims of popery, priestcraft, and superstition, it reigned unquestioned and uncontrolled. But Science has been gradually advancing upon Europe almost from the days of Charlemagne. Writing and reading are become in a manner universal. Logic has acquired an astonishing subtlety and exactness. Natural knowledge has made a perpetual progress. Arts of every kind have been eternally improving. The philosophy of the human mind has been profoundly studied. Political liberty and freedom of enquiry have been continually spreading. The genius of man has displayed itself in the most extraordinary flights. And yet Christianity has stood its ground. Sir Thomas More, and Bacon, and Locke, and Newton were Christians; and, as Hume has well observed, the two latter proved their sincerity by avowing their adherence to a small and unpopular sect of Christians. In other countries we find the fact the same. The most extraordinary powers of intellect appear to have done little to emancipate their possessors from the yoke.

To the catalogue of believers we must unquestionably add Milton. With the most transcendent powers of intellect, and with a courage no human force could subdue, he devoted his mind in its highest vigour, and

made it his principal and proudest work to construct an epic, the express purpose of which is to

——“justify the ways of God to men ;”

and in this epic he has embodied all the most obnoxious propositions above enumerated, together with the extravagant tale of the first man and woman eating an apple, and by that means forfeiting the Divine favour for all their posterity.

The consequence of these representations respecting the decrees of God and the final destination of mankind, has been to paralyse the human understanding, and to restrain us, even in thought, from enquiring into the principles of justice in the most important questions to which they can by possibility be applied. We therefore blindly and passively applaud that from which our intellectual nature shrinks with horror ; and the more tremendous are the threatenings denounced, the more we join in, and repeat for ever, the most lavish praises of this God, whose “tender mercies,” it is said, “are over all His works.” (Psalm cxlv. 9.)

ESSAY III.

ON CONTRITION.

ESSAY III.

On Contrition.

THE main preparation of the seed-plot of virtue consists in self-respect.

It becomes us to be conscious of what we are, and what we are capable of being made.

Jesus Christ has admirably illustrated this, when he said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew xix. 14.) Oh, if all the discourses of Christ and his apostles had been like this, how little should we find to reprove in the Christian religion!

No one, in an honest and pure frame of mind, can look upon a little child without a certain degree of enthusiasm.

Here, in the first place, we have presented to us innocence, unsuspecting, confiding innocence. How great is the capacity for good existing in a little child! Here are no tendencies to evil. He wants only to be led by the hand, to be placed under a sage and right-

minded preceptor, who should watch over the first unfoldings of mind, the first intimations of attention, and action, and enquiry, and to be led into the good way that he may walk therein, and find rest for his soul. He needs only this, that he may become emphatically the ornament of the universe of God. "Of such is" indeed, or ought to be, "the kingdom of heaven."

But how different is this from the orthodox doctrine, the doctrine which receives too much countenance from the Scriptures respecting the nature of man! "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm v. 5.) "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans v. 12.) Adam, according to this doctrine, was placed in Paradise; but he ate of the forbidden fruit, and forfeited the favour of heaven for all his posterity. I have, accordingly, seen parents, who sought in their children for the indications of original sin, and from their earliest infancy found in them marks of perverseness, betokening that they were individuals of the fallen race, the "children of wrath." What a man looks for, if he is already furnished with a preconceived hypothesis, he is very likely to discover. He observes tokens of wilfulness, and obstinacy, and impatience, and from these concludes that his child, if not austere checked and corrected, is the predestined inheritor of hell. He believes that, when he grows up to manhood and age,

he will become the fit subject of everlasting torments. He does not consider that his child, while an infant, has no way of indicating what grieves him but by turbulence and cries. He does not reflect that all this may easily be set right by mildness, by method, by a rational and sober system of proceeding and kindness, without an atom of violence, or even of reproof. He believes that these phenomena are the fruits of the fall of Adam. He infers with the apostle, "They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable. . . . There is none that doeth good, no, not one. That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Romans iii. 12, ff.) Christ had indeed forgotten his lesson, when he "called a little child, and set him in the midst, and said to his disciples, Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

How wretchedly in the meantime is this perverted, when we are told by John, the last of the evangelists, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God! Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John iii. 2, 5.) And again by the apostle, "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." (1 Cor. xv. 48.) "Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put

on the new man." (Col. iii. 9.) "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. ii. 14.) By all this plainly implying, that man, as he is born into the world, is a degenerate and fallen creature, and that he must be renewed, and formed afresh after another model, before he can be found worthy of the approbation of his Creator.

One of the first precepts of the Golden Verses of Pythagoras is *ἡσυχύεο σαυτὸν*, "Reverence thyself." One of the most memorable sayings of Juvenal, the Roman satirist, is *Maxima debetur pueris reverentia*. If thou art intrusted with forming the mind and manners of a child, consider what a sacred charge is reposed in thy hands. Approach to the task with awe, and with a deep sense of the deposit that is committed to thee. According to some, he is an heir of immortality; and as thou dischargest thy trust, he will be happy, the elect of the Creator of heaven and earth, for ever. But laying apart that notion, we may do well to recollect the various and astonishing powers of intellect that may be displayed in this child, the repository which his bosom may contain of high and generous sentiments, and the important part he may be called on to play on the theatre of the world. He will probably have devolved upon him as he grows up the various "charities of father, son, and brother," all the duties that result from the domestic ties of husband and master. His engagements will go further than this: he will be a neighbour and a friend.

He will be a member of some community, and will be called upon in a greater or less degree to discharge his duties, and promote the welfare of the society to which he belongs. He will be called on in his turn to form the minds of others, perhaps to act the part of a citizen and a patriot, perhaps to meditate, and contribute an important share to the general improvement, perhaps to enlighten the understandings, to advance the knowledge, and to animate the social feelings and virtues of his contemporaries, and through them, of succeeding generations. No task can be more sacred than that of education.

He is innocent. Oh, protect him from all contamination, and the approach of impurity! Instil into him the noblest sentiments. Teach him to "love his neighbour as himself." Be careful that all his occupations and his studies may be such as shall be best fitting to be a blessing to his fellow-creatures. Teach him to think highly of the powers that are confided to him, and the part he will be called on to perform.

If reverence, as the poet emphatically expresses it, is due to a child, how much more is it due to a man! Self-respect is one of the first duties of a human creature, and the fit habit of him who would honourably discharge the offices of life. A man should fully impress upon himself the importance of the place he is called upon to fill in society. The first thing required of him is sincerity, that he should have an open front and an

undaunted heart, and that benevolence and philanthropy should mould every lineament of his face, that he should carry his heart in his hand and upon his lips, that we should fearlessly speak the truth each man to his neighbour, and be vigilant in well-doing. He must be like the ermine, of which it is fabled that, if it contracts a stain, it pines away and dies. He must be pure, blameless in thought, disdaining, and, in a manner, incapable of, and inaccessible to, moral pollution. He must be of an upright and a lofty spirit. In this manner, the apostle in one place exhorts us to "possess our vessel in sanctification and honour" (1 Thess. iv. 4); though of how different a character is the general strain of the Scriptures!

This is well expressed by Addison, when, speaking of Marcia, in the tragedy of *Cato*, he says,

"But still the lovely maid improves her charms,
With inward greatness, unaffected wisdom,
And sanctity of manners."

"Inward greatness" is repose, no tumult, a conscious serenity; and, as we find it expressed in the book of Proverbs, "a good man shall be satisfied from himself."

"Unaffected wisdom" happily conveys to us the idea of sound moral excellence, where there is no presumption, nothing inflated, but all is pure and deep, nothing given with vehement and undue emphasis, but everything clear, in a certain sense unimpassioned, and yet with

full articulation, and a tone that marks entire conviction and invariable resolution.

“Sanctity of manners.” This I find admirably dilated by an able writer, but in a fugitive publication. “Serious, from deep thought, but untouched with the slightest severity ; majestic, from a constant communion with high thoughts and majestic images, but altogether removed from the mock majesty of station and state.”

How different are the sanctity of a stoic, and that of a modern saint ! The latter is well described by Clarendon in his account of the siege of Gloucester in 1643, when he says, “Within less than the two hours prescribed by the King for the answer of the townsmen, returned, with the trumpeter, two citizens, with lean, pale, sharp and bad visages ; indeed, faces so strange and unusual, and such in garb and demeanour, that at once made the most severe countenances merry, and the most cheerful hearts sad. The men, without any circumstances of duty and good manners, in a pert, shrill, undismayed accent, said as follows.”

All meanness of soul is especially discordant with the frame of spirit that is most in alliance with virtue. There should be a certain elevation in a good man that might lead him to shake off, as the dust, all that would soil the unquestionableness of his purity. He should appear “in shining garments,” as the angels are represented by the evangelist. He should maintain the spotless cleanness of his soul, even as he received it at the moment of

his birth. He should indulge a decent pride, such as may best preserve him from the contagion of folly and vice. Above all, he should avoid everything that is allied to grossness and sensuality, everything that tends to coarseness, brutality, and profligacy. He should have a springiness of nature, pointing him to the skies. "Descent to him is adverse;" and he feels that it is only by "compulsion and laborious flight" that he can be immersed in dishonour.

At the same time, his temper is no less remote from effrontery and arrogance than it is from what is abject, grovelling, and base. He is characterised with a certain simplicity of spirit, to which it seems as if, in doing all, he did nothing. He acts as if he could not refrain from being virtuous, and is astonished when he finds what it was merely natural for him to do loudly extolled. He assumes no air of greatness, but holds the even tenor of his way almost without effort. Everything that is good is congenial to his habits of thinking and acting. He loves his fellow-creatures, and is ever ready to serve and assist them. His heart beats with benevolent affection. He "vaunts not, and is not puffed up." "He thinks of himself no more highly than he ought to think, but thinks soberly." He does not wear his virtue like a strange garment, but finds it fitting him easily; he wears it unconsciously and with grace.

The good man is a man of clear apprehension, and calculates exactly what he ought to think, and what he

ought to do. He is self-balanced, and scarcely anything can break in upon the serenity of his soul, and the clearness of his mental vision. He is full of courage and hope, and goes on his way rejoicing. He is characterised for the most part by self-complacency and self-approbation. As virtue is the polestar of his voyage through life, so he in a great measure reaps the reward of virtue, while he is practising it, and improving himself in the habits that lead towards its perfection.

Yet, with all this, he is impressed with reverence and awe when he contemplates the universe of nature. He feels how little and how weak is man compared with the wonders that everywhere surround him. He is conscious that there is a mysterious power at work on all sides of him, in the contemplation of which he is penetrated with a chastened humility. Whether he looks up to the heavens, or abroad on the surface of the earth, its mountains and its valleys, or observes the boundless varieties of its vegetation and its fruits, or traces the wonderful structure of the bodies of men and animals, he rejoices that he is the inhabitant of such a world, the member of such a congregation of variegated health and beauty. He reposes a certain confidence in the unseen hand that sustains the whole. He is glad that there is something greater than himself, in the presence of which he feels his soul penetrated with a sacred awe. At the same time, he knows that the "judgments" of this mysterious power are "unsearchable," and his ways past

finding out" (Rom. xi. 33), and therefore he does not presume to penetrate into the secrets of what is sometimes called its Providence, or imagine that it will interest itself in his favour, or in any degree supersede the necessity of his vigilant and strenuous efforts.

But very different from what is here recited is the morality of the Scriptures. The first lesson of a sound philosophy is self-reverence. The first lesson of the Scriptures is self-abasement. "What is man that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job xv. 14—16.) "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." (Psalm xxxiv. 18.) "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm li. 17.) "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isaiah lvii. 15.) "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 3.) "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,

and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions ; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold I was shapen in iniquity.” (Psalm li. 1—5.)

Now all this proceeds upon a false position. Supposing the mysterious power, the plastic nature, to which the universe is indebted for all that is admirable that we see around us, to have any affinity to the nature of man, to have the properties of judgment and will, which, to say the least of it, is very improbable, then it will readily be admitted that it has all moral qualities and attributes in an inconceivably higher degree than man can ever attain to, and that we are but as the dust in his sight : and it may be well for us, upon certain occasions of sacred contemplation, that we should recollect this. But this is not the proper business of man. We are concerned only with the properties and faculties of our nature. If we discharge well the offices which the system of the world has devolved upon us, we have reason to be contented. It will not be of advantage to us, that we should judge contemptuously of the sphere in which we are placed ; but, on the contrary, we ought to consider our functions as of weight, and, however they might appear as insignificant in the eyes of an intellectual being infinitely exalted above us, that their fitting discharge is our sacred duty, and that, so far as we act

well our part, we ought to be satisfied, and feel self-approved and self-acquitted.

The Bible tells us, "Against thee, thee only, have we sinned." (Ps. li. 4.) But this is not true. God, on the supposition that He sees us, cannot be benefited by our virtues, nor in any degree be made worse by our delinquency. Our proper concern is with our fellow-creatures and ourselves. The measure both of our good and our ill deeds depends upon the consideration of how much good they do, and how much evil they inflict upon beings within the sphere of their influence. It is not the unlimited perfection of God, but the limited range of our own capacity, that should decide upon the merits or demerits of what we do.

An irrational opinion has been entertained that God is to be gratified by the humiliation of His creatures. But this is in entire opposition to what we find in the best specimens of human intercourse, and in the conception we have most reason to entertain of the communication (so far as we can apprehend any propriety in that term) of man with his Creator. A generous and exalted being would be best pleased that his dependant should commune with him as a man communes with his friend. It is thus we are told that the "Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." (Exodus xxxiii. 11.) It is thus that God is described as "walking" with man "in the garden" of Eden "in the cool of the day." (Genesis iii. 8.) It is

thus that we read of Enoch, that he "walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." (Genesis v. 24.)

A human protector, as we have just said, if he is of a generous nature, will be far from being gratified by a servile and fawning demeanour in his inferior, by abject flattery, and an attitude as of one that licked the dust. Our addresses to our Creator, if we must imagine something so incomprehensible and remote from all reference and relation, should still retain the characteristics of a being vested with rights as well as duties. He who made us what we are, by so doing contracted an engagement with us, and, though it may be presumptuous in us to attempt to draw the line, and define in what manner it may be discharged, yet certainly he owes his creature justice; and if the merits of the creature be humble, they will not, to him to whom they belong, be without their importance.

But to resume for a moment the diversified phraseology in which the Scripture delights to paint the vileness of our human nature. We are bid to "hide ourselves in the dust for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty." (Isaiah ii. 10.) The most offensive similitudes are not spared, the better to enforce this. We are told that "we are all as an unclean thing, and that our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah lxiv. 6); that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" in us, "but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores, they have not been closed,

neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." (Isaiah i. 6.) We should "put our mouths in the dust, if so be there may be hope, and give our cheeks to him that smiteth them." (Lam. iii. 29, 30.)

All this, as has already been said, is built on the doctrine of the fall of man. Adam broke the first command, and forfeited the Divine favour for himself and his posterity. Sentence of death was passed upon all. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." (Genesis iii. 19.) "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis vi. 5.) "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. v. 12.) "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Psalm xiv. 3.) The doctrine of regeneration expressly goes to this. We must "put off the old man, with his deeds, and put on the new man." (Col. iii. 9, 10.) It is thus that Christ says to his apostles, "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. xix. 28.)

It is therefore in strict conformity with the Scripture that the Liturgy of the Church of England puts this prayer indiscriminately into the mouths of all worshippers,—*"Almighty and most merciful Father, we have*

erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep: we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts: we have offended against thy holy laws: we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health [purity, goodness, principle of salvation—Johnson] in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults; restore thou them that are penitent.”

And it is well known that the Liturgy of the Church of England is framed with comparatively few alterations upon the offices of the Roman Catholic Church, which are understood to have received their present form under Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century.

In both I find expressly the exclamations, “Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord, have mercy upon us:” which have more the air of petitions addressed to an inexorable tyrant, extorted by the last agonies of despair, and seemingly intended by clamour to overpower the obduracy of the being addressed, than the sober and heartfelt emotion of a man who knows that he has recourse to a being of reason and benignity, who, though of an unspeakably exalted sphere, is yet invoked by one who has also his rights, and who is, it may be, of exemplary integrity and unspotted conscience.

And what, after all, is the true meaning of this term,

mercy? The governor of the universe, if he calls all his creatures into judgment, will find in the real merits of the individual who comes before him a reason pointing out the precise treatment to which he is in equity entitled. In courts of human administration the rule is plain; that decision on each individual case is most fit, which shall conduce to the greatest utility of the whole mass of beings that may be influenced by the decision and the treatment of each case which occurs.

In the spirit of exaggeration with which the Scriptures are written, some have been scandalised by St. Paul's adding, where he says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,—of whom I am the chief." (1 Tim. i. 15.) Elsewhere he justly remarks, "Last of all, Christ was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time; for I am the least of the apostles; . . . but by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all." (1 Cor. xv. 8—10.) Some have supposed that he adopted this humility in compunction, as recollecting that, previously to his conversion, he had persecuted the followers of Christ even to the death. But it is more likely that he did it in obedience to the precept of his master, who said, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. xxiii. 12); and "many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." (Matt. xix. 30.)

David in his Psalms delights in the extravagance of his abasement. "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears." (Psalm vi. 6.) And again, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." (Psalm xxxii. 3.) How far this may be supposed gratifying, and to purchase the favour of the Almighty and all-perfect Creator of the universe, every one of course must judge according to his preconceived ideas of infinite wisdom and justice.

The prayers of those who separate themselves from the Church of England are framed upon the same model. As the Scriptures teach us to humble ourselves in the dust, to clothe ourselves in sackcloth, and to scatter ashes on our heads, so those whose practice it is to pour forth unpremeditated prayers are ambitious in the employment of images of the like disparaging nature. I have heard of a divine who in his public devotions indulged in the following tirade: "O Lord, do thou bless thy dust," meaning himself, "and thy dust's dust," his wife, "and the dust of thy dust's dust," their children, "and all thy dust now before thee," the whole congregation. I well remember in early life hearing again and again pronounced on the like occasion, "Lord, we put our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, and cry out, Guilty, guilty, Unclean, unclean."



ESSAY IV.

*ON THE DEATH OF JESUS CONSIDERED AS AN
ATONEMENT FOR SIN.*



ESSAY IV.

On the Death of Jesus considered as an Atonement for Sin.

FROM the doctrines of Christianity in relation to a future state, and to the feelings we ought to entertain as to our moral condition, we will proceed to consider what may in a certain sense be regarded as the great mystery of our religion, the atonement offered for the sins of man to his Creator and final judge.

We have already seen that, according to the Scriptures, man was originally placed in Paradise, in a sinless state, and destined, as it should seem, to a condition of immortal happiness on earth. But the first man, by the breach of the great command of his Creator, forfeited these advantages for himself and his posterity. He was immediately driven out of Eden, and the whole human race were condemned to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, in a greatly deteriorated condition of the earth, and, after a joyless state of existence here, in no great length of time, finally to be extinguished,

every one that was born into the world, by the stroke of death. In all this, so far as relates to our present existence, we have the whole to a great degree confirmed to us by actual experience, and therefore have the less anxiety as to the solution offered us, how it came to be thus.

But man, the species, according to the Scriptures, inherited not misfortune only, but depravity also, from his first progenitor. "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. v. 12.) The consequence of this is expressed by the Psalmist, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm li. 5.) "What is man," says Eliphaz in the book of Job, "that he should be clean, and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job xv. 14—16.) And again the Psalmist, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Psalm xiv. 2, 3.)

The doctrine of regeneration, as taught by Christ, is strictly in conformity to this. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John

iii. 3.) "Ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. xix. 28.)

The apostle, therefore, speaking of the whole heathen world, says, "God gave them over to a reprobate mind, . . . being filled with all unrighteousness." (Rom. i. 28, 29.) Till at length, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His son." (Gal. iv. 4.) And Jesus, speaking by parables, says, "There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard; . . . and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. But, last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son." (Matt. xxi. 33, ff.)

And accordingly we read that when Jesus was now about thirty years of age, "came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. iii. 1, 2.) And, in the process of his discourse, he said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear." . . . Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him; . . . and when he went up . . . out of the water, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the

Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. And, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. iii. 11, ff.)

What it was precisely that Jesus intended when he came forward in his ministry, we can best collect from the language he held, and the conduct he observed. He says of himself, "I and my Father are one." (John x. 30.) And shortly after, "My Father is greater than I." (John xiv. 28.) Prophesying, it would seem, of the day of judgment, one of the evangelists makes him say, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." (Mark xiii. 32.) He is repeatedly called Son of God; and when he cast out devils, they cried out to him, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matt. ix. 29.) He is also styled by the evangelist John emphatically, "the only-begotten of the Father." (John i. 14.) An appellation besides that he affected, was "Son of Man," particularly when he is speaking of the day of judgment. Thus he says, "The tribes of the earth shall mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. xxiv. 30, 31.) This he

affirms repeatedly. And, when he is arraigned before the high priest, he says, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matt. xxvi. 64.)

It does not, however, appear that he aimed at anything more than preaching repentance, and warning his countrymen of a day of great affliction, which was nearly approaching. The Jews had prophecies, as they thought, of a Messiah, a great King, of the race of David, who was to arise among them, to enable them to shake off the yoke of imperial Rome, and to lead them in a glorious series of continual conquests, so that the lustre and prosperity of their second temple should infinitely exceed that of the temple built by Solomon. Jesus so far conformed to this prophecy, as to seem to be particularly anxious to establish his lineage as directly descended from the stock of David.

What was the nature of Jesus's miracles it is difficult to pronounce, except that we know that the age and country in which he lived was in a great degree favourable to such exhibitions. He says to the Pharisees, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?" (Luke xi. 19.) And Simon Magus, shortly after the death of Christ, performed, according to the most ancient fathers, more wonderful feats than any that are related of the Saviour. Jesus, however, appears to have been placed in this respect in a situation of considerable difficulty. If he had

pretended to no miracles, it may be doubted, under the circumstances in which he stood, whether he would have excited any general attention and attachment; and, exhibiting them, there was danger, under the expectation that then existed of the Messiah, that, as the evangelist expresses it, the multitude "would come and take him by force to make him a great king." (John vi. 15.) It is not easy to say with precision what were Jesus's views on the subject. But, if he were ambitious, he must nevertheless have seen with the smallest forecast, that nothing could be more unpropitious to such purposes than to have had them precipitated by the sudden explosion of an inconsiderate multitude. He therefore, as the evangelist goes on to say, immediately "departed into a mountain himself alone." (John vi. 15.) And in another instance, having by a touch healed a person "full of leprosy," he "charged him to tell no man," but to go and shew himself to the high priest, and make an offering as Moses commanded; and then again "withdrew into the wilderness." (Luke v. 14.)

In the whole of his ministry, he appears to have exhibited the utmost simplicity of living; and we are told that when "a certain scribe came, and said to him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," Jesus, to bring him to the test, or by way of fair warning, replied to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son

of Man has not where to lay his head." (Matt. viii. 19, 20.)

Once, indeed, towards the end of his career, and when he appears to have foreseen that he was arrived at the crisis of his fate, he departed from his ordinary cautiousness, and, in a kind of exaltation of spirit, allowed himself to make a sort of triumphal entry into the metropolis of his country. He "sent two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them and bring them unto me. . . . And the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." (Matt. xxi. 1, ff.) It is not indeed unnatural to suppose that Jesus had some fluctuation in his mind, and that there were times when his thoughts inclined to the sentiments entertained by great numbers of his countrymen, to wit, that, being the Messiah, as no doubt he believed himself to be, he should probably prove a great and prosperous prince upon earth.

His mind, however, seemed for the most part to have inclined in another direction. He uttered various pro-

phesies of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the end of the world—events which he appears to have regarded as coincident. Then he says, "They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." To which declaration he invariably adds, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (Matt. xxiv. 30, ff.) And elsewhere he says, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Matt. xvi. 28.) He, however, lays down rules to his disciples, how they should behave themselves amidst the awful events which were to precede the closing scene, in a manner which implies that he would not then be present among them. His idea probably was that, like Enoch and Elijah, he would be taken up to heaven without dying, and would then, after a short interval, return to "judge the quick and the dead." He was so fully impressed with this notion, that we are told, even when he was arraigned before the high priest, a day or two prior to his crucifixion, that he answered in the affirmative to the question of this magistrate, whether he was the Christ the Son of God, and added, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Upon which "the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He

hath spoken blasphemy ; what further need have we of witnesses ?" (Matt. xxvi. 64, 65.) If Jesus then expected in so short a time, before the generation he addressed had passed away, to see the final consummation of this sublunary scene, it is not to be supposed that his thoughts turned with any earnestness to the splendours of temporal grandeur.

But when the event, probably little anticipated by him, took place, of his dying on the Cross, his apostles began to look back upon his career in a very different temper of mind. They were led to consider his death as a part of the original plan of the Father for the Son, and of consequence to regard it as the grand completion of his mission on earth.

This reflection led them, by an obvious association of ideas, to think of the sacrifices which, both according to the religion of the Jews, and that of perhaps every denomination of Pagans, constituted an essential branch of divine worship. In ruder and more uncivilised times, the worship of superior beings, to whose bounty we were supposed to be indebted for the fruits of the earth and for all our blessings, seemed to require a more substantial sort of acknowledgment than the merely reciting certain words of praise and prayer. In thanking the Gods for the bounties bestowed on us, what could be more natural than to offer them as an oblation the first-fruits of our harvests and of our flocks ? This idea of sacrifice as an acknowledgment for the blessings we receive

inevitably in a manner brought along with it another species of sacrifice, intended as an expiation for any offences or crimes of which we might be guilty, either against the laws of morality, or the presumed will of the Gods. In this latter species of sacrifice there was implied a sort of substitution of the thing sacrificed for the real offender. Thus, if the offender deserved death for his breach of the laws of God, the animal sacrificed was put to death, and thus expiated to the divine being for the offence committed, and was accepted in his stead.

“Christ crucified,” as the apostle says, was “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.” (1 Cor. i. 23.) It is scarcely possible to conceive a more unpromising beginning to a religion which was to subdue the nations of the earth, than that its author, after a very short career, should suffer, by the sentence of the magistrate, the capital punishment of a malefactor, and the ignominious death of the Cross. But the authors of the New Testament found out the way to make of him, “Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (Heb. v. 24.) He had, during his lifetime, represented himself as the “only-begotten Son of God” (John iii. 16), affirmed, in a mysterious way, “the Father is greater than I” (John xiv. 28), and predicted his own second coming on earth. What could be more natural than from these premises to infer that his death was the proper consummation of his divine mission? They recollected the sacrifices for sin under the old law; and having

previously concluded that we partook of a fallen nature, and had need to be regenerated and born again before we could see the kingdom of God, they pronounced this mysterious being, the "Son" of the Creator of heaven and earth, to be the great sacrifice for the sins of the world. "God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son" for us. (John iii. 16.) He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter ii. 24); and "by his stripes we are healed." (Ib.) He is the "propitiation for our sins" (1 John ii. 2); and "we have redemption through his blood." (Eph. i. 17.) The mysteriousness of this doctrine was, in fact, its great recommendation. Ignorant man requires mystery, something irreconcilable to simple understanding, and that confounds our reasoning faculties, to accord with his ideas of religion.

And certainly, as the apostle says, "Great is the mystery of godliness." (1 Tim. iii. 16.) If something which confounds the human understanding is necessary to a perfect religion, here undoubtedly we have enough to satisfy the most inordinate appetite. Sin is a thing of so tremendous a nature as to have merited for the whole human race the pains of hell for everlasting. Not, indeed, if we consider the nature of man, who is frail and insignificant; but as we consider the nature of God, who "chargeth His angels with folly" (Job iv. 18), and "the heavens are not clean in His sight." (Job xv. 15.) He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. i. 13), and sin is therefore to be considered, not as the comparatively

trivial offence of an insignificant creature, but as committed against a being endowed with infinite perfection. God is therefore so just that He cannot pardon our faults, and at the same time so merciful and beneficent, that He is in the highest degree disposed to forgive them. "He who might the advantage best have took, found out the remedy." He substituted this mysterious being, His "only-begotten son," for sinful mankind. He "laid upon him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah liii. 6.) He could not remit the transgressions of the world, without at the same time setting forth a memorable record of the demerits of sin. He took a most immaculate and meritorious person, and heaped upon him the greatest ignominy, and the most unspeakable sufferings, that He might testify how irreconcilable to His nature were our manifold offences. By an inconceivable sort of arithmetic, the transitory sufferings of this mighty being were deemed an equivalent for the everlasting damnation of all that should be saved by him. And yet, if he were God, equal with the Father, a notion most in agreement with the idea of his death constituting a satisfaction for the sins of as many as believed on him, yet as he was God, he could not suffer, and as he was man, it can scarcely be imagined that his sufferings could have this great and inexhaustible virtue.

And, after all, how great a juggle is this doctrine of atonement, and how unworthy a scene does it exhibit "in the presence of men and angels!" God could not

rationality, by emptying "the vials of His wrath" upon a most innocent person, manifest His displeasure towards the guilty. This change of the parties—directing His vengeance against the being most worthy of His favour, and becoming reconciled to the genuine offenders, is the farthest in the world from indicating His purity and His justice.



ESSAY V.

ON PROVIDENCE.



ESSAY V.

On Providence.

THE Christian religion is especially based upon the idea of a God, who, having first created the visible universe out of nothing, and then having determined to conduct its revolutions and phenomenæ according to fixed laws, occasionally interrupts the operation of these laws, first, by miracles designed to confirm the revelation of His will to mankind, and secondly, by particular providences, the purpose of which is in some cases to confound and punish the notoriously guilty, and in others to demonstrate His protection and care to those who are specially the objects of His approbation.

Thus He is said to have caused the sun to "stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon" (Joshua x. 12), for the space of a whole day, that Joshua might take ample vengeance upon the Amorites, who had marched in hostile array against the children of Israel. Thus He sent Moses with seven miraculous plagues to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, that He might be

induced to let the Jews go and settle in the promised land. Thus he drowned Pharaoh and His host in the Red Sea. Thus He gave to Moses in person the two tables of the Law, "written with the finger of God" (Exodus xxxi. 18), upon Mount Sinai. And thus He caused the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; He cast out devils, He raised the dead, and finally raised the Saviour himself from the tomb, in confirmation of the divine mission of Jesus.

And, as to a particular Providence, Jesus expressly said to his disciples, when he sent them out to preach the gospel, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father? But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." (Matt. x. 29—31.) And, in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink. . . . Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. . . . And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more

clothe you, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. vi. 25, ff.) And St. Peter writes, "Cast all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." (1 Peter v. 7.)

Indeed, the whole system of prayer turns on the belief of a particular Providence. We have a prayer for fine weather, and a prayer for rain: in other words, we conceive that, by addressing the Almighty Creator of the universe with our petitions for that particular state of the atmosphere of which we apprehend ourselves to be in want, we shall move Him to interpose in our favour, and to change that order of the seasons which would otherwise have taken place. Thus we read in the first Book of Kings, and still more expressly in the general Epistle of James, that for three years and six months there was no rain on the earth during the reign of Ahab; but, upon the prayer of Elijah in the fourth year, God sent abundance of rain, so that the wants of man and beast were plentifully satisfied. And indeed the whole of the Old and New Testament presents us with continual instances of the interposition of the Most High in answer to the prayers of the faithful. The apostle expressly says, "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and gives this instance of Elijah in illustration of his position. (James v. 16, 17.)

I well know how pleasing it is to the pious soul to believe that God perpetually watches over us for our good; that, whether we wake or sleep, we are still under the protection of Providence, and that, as the apostle

expresses it, "all things work together for good to them that love God." (Rom. viii. 28.) We are sensible of our own weakness, how little a way we can see before us, how ignorant we are of what is best for us, and are glad to refer everything to a being infinitely wiser than ourselves, and of infinite benevolence. We are willing to believe that everything is good, and that the "righteous man is taken away from the evil to come." (Isaiah lvii. 1.) We are taught to understand, like the Hermit, in Parnell, that the ways of heaven are mysterious, and that often the things that most shock our feeble apprehensions conduce to the wisest and most beneficent purposes. We read in the Apostle James, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray." (James v. 13.) We pray in the midst of adversity; and our hearts are lightened. When we are overtaken with grievous calamities, we refer all to the disposal of a being infinitely wiser than ourselves, and are contented. When our children, our parents, or the wife of our bosom is taken from us, we say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job i. 21.) We cultivate a sentiment of resignation, and find ourselves inexpressibly soothed with the idea that we are in the hands of God, who is better to us "than our iniquities deserve." (Ezra ix. 13.) There is something irresistibly pleasing to frail and imperfect beings, such as we are, in these ideas. "As for man," says the Psalmist, "his days are as grass;

as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them." (Psalm ciii. 15—18.)

But it is time that we should be acquainted with our real position. It cannot but be beneficial to us to know what we have to depend on. Though we are undoubtedly weak and frail, yet that can be no good reason why we should render ourselves still weaker, but rather that we should "gird up the loins of our mind," and lean upon a rock that cannot deceive us.

The ideas of a particular Providence are in fact referable to times of ignorance, when all nature was new to us, or, if not new, when men had so little methodised their ideas that they were not able to reduce the phenomena around them into a system. Experience, if properly consulted, is that alone which can guide us through the secrets of the universe.

Our savage ancestors (and the same observation may be applied to periods of comparative civilization) in every unusual event recognised the interference of some invisible being interrupting the course of nature. Storms and tempests, inundations, and famine, and earthquakes, they referred to the anger of a God. Eclipses, and uncommon phenomena of nature, and pestilences, and

contagious diseases filled them with terror, but at the same time with reverence. Even accidents befalling our corporeal frame; and everything disastrous and unforeseen, they ascribed to the interposition of a God. Portents and prodigies were observed by all, and served to fill the human species with awe.

From the same cause arose the belief in ghosts and miracles. The ideas of sorcery, of supernatural powers possessed by a few gifted persons among the sons of men, of commerce with demons, and compacts, by which the devil on one side engaged to favour the unhallowed designs of certain misanthropical and malignant individuals, and they in return gave him their bodies and souls to all eternity, everywhere prevailed; and hundreds and thousands of poor victims have, on this score, been sacrificed, in different ages of the world, at the altar of human credulity and folly.

In the meantime, the improvements that have been effected in natural philosophy have by degrees convinced the enlightened part of mankind that the material universe is everywhere subject to laws, fixed in their measure, weight, and duration, capable of the most exact calculation, and which in no case admit of variation and exception. Whatever is not thus to be accounted for is of mind, and springs from the volition of some being, of which the material form is subjected to our senses, and the action of which is in like manner regulated by the laws of matter. Beside this, mind as well as matter is subject to

fixed laws, and thus every phenomenon and occurrence around us is rendered a topic for the speculations of sagacity and foresight. Such is the creed which science has universally prescribed to the judicious and reflecting among us.

How these laws originate, and by what power they are carried into execution, we are in reality ignorant. The more usual creed is that both are to be referred to an infinite and all-perfect mind, who created at first, and since continually superintends, the whole machine. But we know nothing of mind but what we observe in ourselves ; and the properties of a mind competent to all this, bear so little analogy to what we find in ourselves, that no sober person can imagine he comprehends, or can truly be said to believe in the existence of such a mind.

But, granting this hypothesis to be just, we are not a whit the nearer to our object in the point of view now under consideration. Proceeding on the assumption of such a mind, we appear thoroughly to know that this all-perfect being restricts himself to the execution of the general laws he has in the first place laid down, and that he "sees with equal eye," as the poet sings,

"A hero perish, or a sparrow fall."

There is an entire end, therefore, to the idea of a special Providence ; or that,

"When the loose mountain trembles from on high,"

the law of gravitation shall be suspended in its operations, lest some person of illustrious virtue should be crushed by its fall ; and, on the other hand, some ruin nodding to its overthrow should reserve its crash to destroy the life of an individual whose propensities are singularly hostile to the well-being of others. The superintending mind, if such should be the true solution of the enigma of the universe, at least certainly turns us out into the world he has made, leaving us to encounter the good or the ill that may result from the general laws of nature, and committing it to our own observation and sagacity to improve the tides and mechanical powers of matter, so as to further our desires, or to avoid the evils which, but for the exercise of our own vigilance and faculties of prevention, might overtake us.

And especially the efficacy of prayer is by this view of things put entirely out of the question. Indeed it is, on the face of the matter, inexpressibly absurd to suppose either that we can instruct the great mover of the machine, or that by our humiliation or importunities we can induce him to alter his purposes. The conduct of the whole must be governed by momentous considerations, each wheel, as in a vast piece of mechanism, must govern and be governed by its connection with others, and to believe that the wishes and desires of any individual or congregation of individuals should suspend and vary the direction of the universal scheme, or should even for a moment be attended to and not be swallowed

up in its insignificance, must display a superlative incapacity in the person by whom the mistake is made, together with a degree of egotism and narrowness of soul, which would be altogether incredible, were it not that in so many instances we find it unequivocally realised.

A few pages back we observed that it was irresistibly pleasing to frail and imperfect creatures, such as we are, to believe that God perpetually watches over us for our good, and that, whether He gives or takes away, all is ordered for the best, and in such a manner as, if we saw further into the revolution of events, we should, each of us for ourselves, perceive to give us true cause for congratulation.

But let us enquire whether, upon any tenable hypothesis, this idea can be reconciled with the truth of things. It is idle, and disgraceful to the faculties of man, perpetually to pamper himself with thoughts that have no solid foundation, and never to dare to look through the veil, and to penetrate into the realities of the universe in which we live.

The system of things, then, if we would impartially survey it, is not altogether so satisfactory as some dreamers would have us believe. There is much of beauty and much of good in the world. The admirable structure of men and animals, of the vegetable creation that feeds us, and the scenery which delights the eye and our other senses, and is adapted to nourish in us com-

placency, are too obvious to be liable to controversy. But there is also much of evil and much of suffering on the earth, insomuch as in the infancy of philosophy to have inspired the idea that there is in it an eternal contention of two principles, the one friendly, the other hostile to the well-being of mankind. It is impossible for us to remark to what a vast extent suffering and calamity reign in the world, without our being impressed with serious doubts as to the infinite power and benevolence which is said to rule the machine. Even as to the crimes and perversities which prevail among the sons of men, we can scarcely avoid thinking that perfect and almighty wisdom might have conducted things better than we behold them. All these considerations might tend to moderate our complacent and entire reliance on that Providence which we are told orders all things for the best.

And it is still worse if we impartially take into our view that God that the Christian revelation sets before us. He is a being who selects a small portion of mankind for His special favour, and reserves the vast majority of our species for everlasting torments in hell. This is surely a character, on whose Providence it is not reasonable for us to place our unreserved and confident reliance. We praise him in reality principally because we fear him; and the language we hold when we approach what we call the throne of his grace, is vehemently opposed to the secret thoughts of our hearts, and our unbiassed esti-

mate of his administration, which is such as we scarcely dare to whisper to ourselves in the deepest seclusion.

If there are any that can with satisfaction place their trust in the dispensations of that Providence, which, as the apostle says, "careth for us," it must be only those who consider themselves as among the few who are selected from the vast mass of mankind as the special favourites of heaven. And even these must "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. ii. 12.) They must, as the more orthodox express themselves, be "struck with astonishment at their narrow and unmerited escape." They must regard their Creator as an austere master, "taking up that he laid not down, and reaping that which he did not sow." (Luke xix. 22.) The disciple, whom, as we are told, "Jesus loved," has delivered to the world as a maxim, that "perfect love casteth out fear." (1 John iv. 18.) But among Christians, speaking rationally, it can never be so. The same apostle teaches us, "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in wickedness." (1 John v. 19.) He therefore must be a man of a peculiar constitution, that, however secure he may be of his own salvation, does not feel a sacred horror and a nameless fear of that God who has thus miraculously rescued him. Even the fanatic himself, who in his own thoughts is elevated to the highest heavens, must sometimes recollect how unlike these heavens are to the pit from which he has so narrowly escaped. Do we not, in the daily prayer of our Liturgy,

confess that "there is no health in us?" Such clauses, I grant, are too often repeated as vague phrases of humiliation. But, combined with the terrible denunciations of the gospel for a future state, they may well inspire us with alarm. Which of us shall "stand in the sight" of that God, before whom the "heavens are not clean, and who chargeth His angels with folly?" He must be a daring man who relies with his confidence that he is a chosen favourite of this being. And, if he is not sure that he shall "escape the damnation of hell," how can he with consistency take to himself the consolation that God will be forbearing and merciful towards him in the things of this life?

NOTE TO ESSAY V. (*Fragment.*)

Since writing the Essay on Providence, I have had occasion to look into the "History of the Discovery of America."

Jesus says, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matt. x. 30.)

Sterne has turned this idea in the finest vein of poetry, when he calls God "the great sensorium of the world, which vibrates, if but a hair fall from our head in the remotest desert of His creation."

But how is this borne out by the fact?

Dugald Stewart affirms, that the "conquest of the

New World was effected, on a low estimate, by the murdering of ten millions of the species." *

The inhabitants of South America "gazed in silent admiration" upon the Spaniards that visited them. They respected them as a superior order of beings, and concluded that they were "children of the sun, who had descended to visit the earth." They "kissed their feet, and honoured them as sacred beings allied to Heaven." †

The island of Hispaniola, when first discovered by Columbus, is said to have contained three millions of people. But let us reject the three millions asserted by the Spanish historians, and with Robertson reduce them to one million. These in fifteen years were diminished to sixty thousand, in a few years more to fourteen thousand, and were shortly after entirely exterminated. ‡ Montezuma, the sovereign of Mexico, was by his barbarous invaders thrown into chains, and in a very short time slain in a skirmish by his own subjects; and Atatiba, the monarch of Peru, was seized upon by the faithless Pizarro, to whom he had come on a friendly visit, who pretended to ransom him; but, having received the stipulated amount, still detained him a prisoner, and speedily brought him to trial, and condemned him to be publicly executed.

* Life of Robertson.

† Robertson, "History of America," Book II.

‡ Robertson, Book III.

Is it possible to conceive atrocities more horrible than those, or that more irresistibly called for the divine vengeance on the authors?

With a view to varnish over and extenuate the ways of Heaven in such cases, God has been said to be "long-suffering," waiting till the iniquities of man be full, and then pouring out the fierceness of His wrath in a way as overwhelming as was His "strange apparent" clemency. But almost two centuries and a half have passed over, and we are yet to learn how the unexampled sufferings of these innocent people have been repaid.

ESSAY VI.

ON THE QUESTION, WHAT SHALL WE DO TO BE SAVED?



ESSAY VI.

On the Question, What shall we do to be Saved?

(Fragment.)

CHRISTIANITY, like all the sallies of mortal enthusiasm, is a mass of contradictions.

Jesus was in his heart a fervent reformer. He aimed at the highest things. He instructed his followers, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. v. 48.) He taught, as "the first and great commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. xxii. 37—40.) In following these two precepts, man shall undoubtedly become all that is most excellent of which his nature is capable. He shall be generous, and high-minded, and enthusiastic. He shall put everything in its proper place and degree. He shall see everything as an eye that sees the whole universe would see it. He shall estimate all things at their genuine

and unalterable value, without a perpetual recurrence to the miserable standard of self, and treating them, not as they are, but as they bear upon his own interests. This standard would represent the best action that ever was performed, as the action in the whole world, of the most exquisite and deliberate injustice, since it was the action in which the greatest good was most directly postponed to personal gratification.

But, after all, this is not the great characteristic of the Christian system. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm cxi. 10.) "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. ii. 12.) All is referred to a future state of punishments and rewards. We shall be "saved, yet so as by fire." (1 Cor. iii. 13.) "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts xiv. 22.) "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter iv. 18.)

We are to come "trembling," like the "keeper of the prison before Paul and Silas, and fall down at the feet of the apostles, and cry, Sirs, what shall we do to be saved?" (Acts xvi. 25, ff.)

There are two principles from which, hypothetically considered, the form of a blameless life may spring. The one is disinterested, according to which the agent treats everything agreeably to its genuine value, and has his heart so duly poised, that he is led out irresistibly to the excellence of the object, and the good to be done,

without turning aside to the miserable calculations of the benefit to accrue to himself, and regulating his actions accordingly. This latter I should describe in the language of the apostle, as "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Tim. iii. 5.)

It is true that two men acting upon these two principles, may externally perform the same acts, and thus far resemble each other. But how immeasurable is the difference between them in the eye of omniscience! The one is, as Seneca says, a "spectacle, in the contemplation of which God, when surveying the works of His hands, may be conceived to repose with complacency and delight." The other, though measuring his actions by the square and the line, and doing in appearance the same things as the former, is "like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." (Matt. xxiii. 27.)

The latter of these persons, though seemingly engaged in the acts of thanksgiving and praise to his maker, yet is in reality hollow, and is "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." (1 Cor. xiii. 1.) He does good to his neighbours, bestows his alms upon them, and relieves their distresses. He pours the voice of consolation into their ears, warns them against the danger of doing amiss, and exhorts them to acts of rectitude and virtue. But his heart is not in all these things. He is only

thinking how he shall lay up "treasure for himself in heaven."

The whole of his proceeding is founded upon a principle of bargain and sale. So many acts of piety towards God, and charity towards man, will purchase me heaven, and so many will exempt me from everlasting punishment. His heart is unaltered; his eye is fixed on one point, as the needle ever holds its direction to the pole; and he therefore takes care to perform no works of supererogation. Like Shylock, he is condemned to the necessity of cutting "no less, nor more, than just a pound of flesh;" if he cut more,

———— "be it but so much
As makes it light or heavy in the substance,
On the division of the twentieth part
Of one poor scruple; nay, if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair,"

he departs from his principle. He is like a good Catholic, when he counts his beads. He knows mechanically when he finishes his tale, and there stops. His heart is unaltered, and he discharges his functions with the punctuality of a machine. He is cold and unfeeling, as to the effect of what he does upon the object respecting which he operates, as a block of marble.

The greater part of mankind are prone, more than enough, to considerations of self-interest and self-gratification. It is only those who are framed of a

happier mould that are continually actuated by more generous considerations. Their pulses beat with a warmer sentiment, and their hearts are ready to fly out of their bosoms, and rise, as it were, to the very throat, and choke their utterance at the moment when they would pour out with exuberance the whole of what they feel.

But the human soul is of a very ductile composure, easily yielding to the impressions that are sought to be made upon it. We may be hardened into so many arithmetical machines, calculating with readiness, What shall I get by it? It is in this sense that it has been said by men of a grosser mettle, that every man has his price. Or we may be trained to a certain heroism, "spurning the low dunghill where our fate had thrown us, and towering up to" the skies, from which the soul of man seems originally to have descended. It is the business of the purest codes of morality to encourage this propensity as much as possible, and gradually to extinguish in us every thing of a baser and more inglorious temperament.

Now, how does the Christian system operate in this respect? It turns, as its grand pivot, upon the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John v. 28,

29.) Eternal rewards and everlasting punishments are set before us. If we were only to receive a crown, if we were simply to be hailed with the salutation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. xxv. 21), it were well. We might subside, in the fruition, or the expectation, after a time, into temperance and sobriety. But, when the rewards proposed are such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor. ii. 9) to conceive, and the punishments are, to be "cast into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" for ever and ever,—all must reasonably be concentrated in the most intense selfishness. Where the question is of thousands of millions of ages of bliss or of misery to myself, there can be no room for a thought of what may happen to others. All subtlety and refinement, all overflowing of a generous sentiment, must be at an end; and the mighty thought of what is at stake for myself must necessarily swallow up all incidental considerations.

ESSAY VII.

ON FAITH AND WORKS.



ESSAY VII.

On Faith and Works.

THE Christian religion is nowhere more palpably exposed to the charge of self-contradiction than in the trite and never-exhausted controversy of faith and works.

Jesus, in his last instructions to his apostles, immediately before his alleged ascension into heaven, says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 15, 16.)

Yet elsewhere he says, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John v. 28, 29.) And again, "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matt. xvi. 27.)

St. Paul is most express in the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, and enforces it by every variety of phrase that his ingenious and subtle logic could supply. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works." (Eph. ii. 8, 9.) "That we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal. ii. 16.) "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight. . . . Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Rom. iii. 20, 28.)

St. James, on the other hand, as if he wrote in express opposition to the apostle of the Gentiles, affirms, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. . . . Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? . . . Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James ii. 17, ff.)

Why does St. Paul insist so vehemently upon salvation by faith alone? That he may shew that God does the whole by His free grace. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. ii. 8, 9.) "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. . . .

Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith." (Rom. iii. 24, ff.) "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." (Rom. iv. 16.) "And if by grace, then is it no more of works." (Rom. xi. 6.) "Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Gal. v. 4.)

The doctrine of St. Paul turns upon an imaginary contention, not a little ludicrous, between the Creator and the creature. When we consider the Creator, such as theism and Christianity combine to represent him to us, as a being of infinite wisdom and infinite power, for ever the same, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James i. 17), on the one hand, and man on the other, the creature of an hour, the sport of every wind, of no more worth and estimation in the eyes of him, who "through vast immensity can pierce," than a gnat or a butterfly, it is impossible to imagine anything so absurd as that God should be jealous of such a being. St. Paul represents God as for ever watchful lest man should claim anything as of himself, and should not confess that he is at all times at the disposal of that wonderful power who called him out of nothing at first, and prescribes concerning him afterwards at pleasure. God, upon the supposition of a future state of rewards and punishments, will, doubtless, distinguish every man according to his merits, and his fitness or unfitness to partake of the glorious state which is

described as the portion of the deserving. All that confidence and erectness of spirit which proceeds from conscious virtue must be acceptance in His sight ; and it must arise only from a low and poor conception of His perfections to suppose that He demands humiliation from man as requisite to a proper view of his subordination. It would be more becoming, as Seneca says, to believe that the object that God beholds with the highest delight is a man who, however oppressed with a concourse of ills, still preserves an unabated serenity and courage.

In reality, there was something exceedingly perplexing in the Christian system, which required a great degree of ingenuity to unravel. If in the day of judgment every man was to be rewarded according to his works, then what need was there of the great sacrifice of atonement, that the Saviour of the world should take upon him our transgressions, and [that by his stripes we should be healed? It is no matter that man should be exceedingly frail, and his best performances imperfect : "God knoweth our frame ; He remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm ciii. 14), and does not require of us more than our faculties enable us to perform. He accepts our righteousness, such as it is, and does not demand any atonement, because we cannot do more than the nature of man admits.

It having once been laid down by the apostle, that the true Christian is saved by faith alone, and that for the purpose of precluding boasting, and that man might

not attribute to himself the smallest merit in the affair, it became the business of divines to ascertain the precise nature of faith, the more effectually to support this hypothesis. Merit, according to most systems of morality, is ascribed to acts of the will ; but faith or belief, in its strictest sense, is the act of the understanding only. Evidence is set before the mind ; and we frequently cannot help believing what is presented to us with irresistible evidence, however unwilling we may be to yield credit to it. From hence it has been inferred that there cannot be the smallest claim of merit in the man that believes ; the evidence is presented to his mind, and his assent follows, as surely as day succeeds upon the rising of the sun.

In the meantime, these divines were decidedly of the opinion that a certain degree of purity of sentiment and harmony of soul were necessary to qualify a man for entering into what they call the kingdom of heaven. "The pure in heart," and they only, "shall see God." But they maintained that there was an indissoluble connection between men's opinions and their voluntary actions. This fact is only rendered obscure to us by the circumstance, that opinion in ordinary cases is perpetually fluctuating, and that the herd of spectators, not advertng to this, attribute that to a man as his opinion, which is seldom or never present to his mind. Lord Shaftesbury acutely observes, "There are few who think always consistently, or according to one certain hypo-

thesis," upon any question of theory and speculation merely. "It is evident in the case of the most devout people, even by their own confession, that there are times when their faith hardly can support them in the belief of a supreme wisdom; and that they are often tempted to judge disadvantageously of a Providence, and just administration in the whole. That alone therefore is to be called a man's opinion, which is of any other the most habitual to him, and occurs upon most occasions." *

But this does not go far enough. There is such a thing as a theoretical opinion which never advances to practice. It is of the head merely, and not of the heart. It is like water in a canal, which exists indeed, but never rises high enough to be conveyed into the basin which is its proper receptacle. The apostle distinguishes these two by the denominations of the "letter" and the "spirit," where he says, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (2 Cor. iii. 6.) Not that there is necessarily any essential difference between these, except in degree. Certain mystical divines have interpreted this as of a literal meaning and an allegorical. But this distinction is not founded in the New Testament. A true theological faith differs from that which is ordinary, merely in vividness. It is animating, and overflows into those conduits which change the character, and modify

* "Characteristics," Treatise iv., B. I., Part i., sec. 2.

the conduct. It is a faith that is ever present, or at least upon all grave and cardinal occasions. It changes our nature, and by its energy regulates our sentiments and our actions. It is therefore, like an ordinary and barren faith, purely the result of evidence bright as the meridian sun, and irresistible in its effects. It is altogether distinct from any idea of merit in him with whom it dwells.

Faith, however, is not so strictly and simply an act of the understanding as these persons would have us believe. And accordingly, Jesus upon all occasions treats an unbelief in his solemn communications, and the virtue by which his miracles are performed, as a crime. There is indeed an evidence which is irresistible, and which enforces conviction upon the most stubborn and unwilling. But this does not hold in the majority of cases. Men, in the ordinary course of events, are apt to believe only what they wish to be true. "Eyes have they, but they see not; ears but they hear not, neither do they understand with their hearts." It is in this sense that the writer of the Acts of the Apostles compliments the people of Berea, saying, that "they were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts xvii. 11.) The term "more noble" is certainly here used as denoting a moral quality, and is therefore allied to the nature of merit. And accordingly the

Church recommends a suitable preparation for reading the Scriptures, and advises that the exercises in this duty should be preceded by prayer. Indeed, it is past question that the effect of what we read and what we hear depends as much upon the previous frame of mind of the reader or hearer, as upon the absolute contents of what is presented to his senses.

There is a sect of Christians, who, feeling themselves dissatisfied with this definition of faith as an act of the understanding only, make saving faith consist in what they call the "act of appropriation." This is thus explained. It is profane, they say, to suppose that Christ died for any but such as will finally receive the benefit of his atonement. Therefore they affirm the doctrine of Particular Redemption, or that Christ died only for the elect. Accordingly, they make saving faith to consist in the intimate persuasion, that "Christ died for me in particular," and that I shall beyond doubt finally receive the benefit of his redemption. This doctrine is to be found in Hervey's "Theron and Aspasio," and is perhaps implied in the creed of all those who believe in the Christian article of predestination.

It is impossible to conceive anything more absurd and sacrilegious than this theory. It makes the salvation of mankind a question merely depending on temper, sanguine on the one side, or gloomy and diffident on the other. The man of a confident and presumptuous disposition easily persuades himself that he is a favourite

with his maker. He sees visions, and believes that he is in intimate communion with the author of nature, and with the son who sits on his right hand. He walks in air, nourishes a full opinion that he is one of God's chosen people, and looks down with contempt on the rest of mankind. On the other hand, a man of modest and scrupulous habits of mind, but of merit a thousand times greater than the former, feels that he wants the grace of assurance, and dares not presume that he is in the light of God's countenance. Having been taught that the grace of assurance is indispensable to his being numbered among the elect, he "walketh in darkness," and gropes like a blind man for the pillar on which he may repose his hopes. He believes that he is excluded from the favour of heaven, looks forward to a future state with emotions of indescribable horror, and not seldom has the faculties of his mind utterly subverted with the anticipation of the dreadful sentence that awaits him in another world.



ESSAY VIII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF JESUS.



ESSAY VIII.

On the Character of Jesus.

GIBBON, in his "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," has dedicated one portion of his work to the enquiry, what human causes mainly contributed to the progress and first establishment of the Christian religion over so large a portion of the Roman world. I propose in like manner in this essay to enquire as to what personal qualities in the author of that religion especially conduced to the causing this system of faith to experience the prosperous and wonderful fortune it has found among the inhabitants of the globe.

I approach with reverence and awe to the character of a man who has produced an infinitely greater effect on the history of mankind than any other individual that was ever born into the world. And what renders all this the more extraordinary is, that he lived in an obscure corner of the globe, and was descended from a people universally contemned and hated among the

more refined and civilized nations of the globe. He was the son of a carpenter, and spent his whole life among the most rigorous privations. His first followers were illiterate fishermen and disgraceful tax-gatherers. His ordinary companions were among the humblest of mankind. It is doubtful whether his public career endured three years, or only one. At the age of thirty-three years or thirty-one, he was accused as a seditious person and a disturber of the public peace, and, having first been bandied backward and forward from the tribunal of the high-priest to that of the Roman governor of Judea, was condemned to suffer death as a malefactor, was nailed to the cross, and expired in the face of the world. He left nothing behind him in writing. And yet this man, thus unfavourably circumstanced in every external consideration, has bequeathed to mankind a system of faith and religious observances, which has endured for nearly two thousand years, and, for a considerable part of the time, among nations the most enlightened and refined that the world ever saw. We do not yet perceive any definite indications of the extinction of this system.

The system itself is founded in falsehood. Jesus Christ pretended to come with an immediate commission from the Creator of the universe to reform mankind, to abolish idolatry, and to propagate a new and purer system of theology and benevolence. It is presumed that no person of a sound understanding and an impartial mind can have read the preceding essays, and

then entertain the slightest idea of the divine and supernatural origin of the Christian religion. It derived its commencement solely from the ruminations and meditations of its human author.

This author, then, must have been a person of great genius, of profound contemplation, of exemplary purity, and the most exalted tone of feeling and thinking. He lived in a nation sunk in the grossest ignorance and superstition. They had long lost their rank as an independent people, and were now in subjection to the Roman empire, there existing on both sides, in the governor and the governed, the most determined estrangement and aversion, the Romans despising the Jews as the most bigoted and self-opinionated people on the face of the earth, with habits and ceremonies the most irreconcilable to all that was generous and liberal, and the Jews hating the Romans as idolaters—a weakness from which they had long been free, and submitting with indescribable horror and impatience to a yoke, from which they felt it impossible to unshackle themselves. Their religion was nothing but a series of petty observances; and accordingly the Pharisees, the most popular sect among them, were puffed up with spiritual pride, imagining that they comprised everything that was excellent among them, and looking down with ineffable disdain upon all others, whether foreigners, or of their own country.

The only considerable circumstance that seemed to

favour the purposes of Jesus, was the expectation, generally at that time entertained among the Jews, of the coming of the Messiah, who was at least then understood to mean a temporal prince, that by dint of military exploits should free their nation from a foreign yoke, raise them to great splendour, and go forth beyond the limits of Judea in a triumphant career, "conquering and to conquer." (Rev. vi. 2.) Before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves; who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him; he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed." (Acts v. 36, 37.) And Jesus himself says, that many shall arise in his name, saying, "Lo, here is Christ, or there," and shall deceive many. (Matt. xxiv. 23.)

Jesus, however, does not appear to have been animated with the ambition to become a temporal prince. His meditations were all of a moral nature, and rising above the narrow prejudices of his countrymen, he aspired to propagate, with a few exceptions which shall be hereafter specified, the purest principles of conduct that had ever been disseminated. The admirable precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," had scarcely been heard of when he assumed it as one of the corner-stones

of his system. And his illustration of this principle is scarcely less sublime than the principle itself. There was a certain race of men bordering upon Judea who were called Samaritans, to whom the Jews bore a particular antipathy on account of some distinctions as to their religious rites and ceremonies. Jesus, therefore, being questioned by a lawyer, by way of bringing his principle to the test, "Who is my neighbour?" answered thus: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and, when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?" (Luke x. 30—36.)

It is too common among the narrow and the selfish, who adhere to a religious creed and believe in a future

state, to enquire what moral practices will be indispensably required of them, and at how cheap a rate they may escape the condemnation of a future world. Jesus sets himself expressly in opposition to this sort of compounding, and recommends to his disciples, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. v. 48); well aware that he who aims at anything less than the highest will certainly fall into an inglorious and fitful mediocrity.

In aiming, however, at the utmost possible perfection, Jesus may in some instances be suspected of overstepping the golden mean. Thus, to one asking him, "Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" he having answered, "Keep the commandments," and the other rejoining, "All these things have I kept from my youth up, what lack I yet?" Jesus proceeded, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." (Matt. xix. 16, ff.) It may well be doubted whether a well-disposed person having "great possessions" ought not rather to regard himself as the steward and superintendent of these possessions, administering gradually to the occasions of those who might stand in need of his assistance, than to part with them at once, and so put an end to his usefulness.

In the same spirit, Jesus in another place delivers himself thus: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and

brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke xiv. 26.)

And on another occasion he said to one that attended him, "Follow me ;" to which the person addressed rejoined, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." And Jesus replied in a harsh and severe style, "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach." (Luke ix. 60.)

In the celebrated Sermon on the Mount he says, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . . Behold the fowls of the air ; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?" (Matt. v. 25, 26.)

In another part of the same sermon he says, less perniciously, but in an equally exaggerated spirit of self-denial, "Resist not evil ; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." (Matt. v. 39, 40.)

It must be confessed that in all these exaggerations there is a noble and a gallant spirit, which leads us in some degree to admire the speaker. But when we consider him as endeavouring to lay down an everlasting code of morals, what he says under these heads is worthy of distinct and unhesitating censure. And we shall see by-and-by that the same spring and impulse of error,

allowed in another direction, leads to mistakes of the most supreme and fatal consequence.

But here it is proper that we should pause a little to consider how this exemplary impulse of the author of our religion operated upon him in his personal intercourse and temper, so as most essentially to aid his great purpose of planting a religion that should, as he figuratively expresses it, be as "a grain of mustard-seed, . . . which is indeed the least of all seeds; but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." (Luke xiii. 31, 32.)

There is a striking resemblance between the history of Jesus and that of Socrates. Neither the one nor the other left anything behind him in writing. They both of them distinguished themselves by being perpetually engaged in oral communications, and in the delivery of moral counsels. Socrates, as well as Jesus, applied his instructions to the subjects of individual discipline and social intercourse, and set a comparatively small value on the researches of science. They appear both to have adopted for their guidance a system of the utmost plainness, simplicity, and self-denial. They both ended their lives by a sentence of death, pronounced against them by the tribunal of their respective countries. The memoirs of Socrates were composed by Xenophon and Plato, two of the most eminent literary geniuses of their age and country. The memoirs of Jesus were written

by tax-gatherers and fishermen, but with a plainness and apparent sincerity which cannot be too much admired. For their qualifications for this undertaking they must have been indebted to the instructions and example of their master. There are said to have been forty histories of Jesus composed in the apostolic age, out of which the four contained in our canon were deliberately selected by an early council of the primitive church. What comparison, however, can be instituted between the effects of the never-dying preachings of Jesus, read in all churches and among diversified nations, and the discourses of the Grecian sage, which have long been almost forgotten, except by a few men who have devoted their leisure to explore the curious remains of antiquity?

But to return to a view of the demeanour and temper of the author of our religion. We are told that, when he was twelve years old, he went up to Jerusalem with his father and mother to keep the feast of the Passover, as was the custom among the Jews. And, when the feast was over, his parents set out on their return; but Jesus, without their being aware of it, was left behind. The next day they went back to Jerusalem, seeking him. And, "after three days they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And, when they saw him, they were amazed; and his

mother said to him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" To which he replied, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and dwelt at Nazareth, and was subject unto them. . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke iii. 46, ff.) After this we hear no more of him, till he was about thirty years of age.

If there is no mistake in all this, it shews at how early a period his mind conceived the idea of that destination, which made him in the sequel the most extraordinary among the sons of men.

Everywhere we find him conducting himself with the utmost meekness and patience, except in instances where his holy zeal was inflamed against such persons as he conceived stubbornly to oppose themselves to his apprehended divine mission, or who polluted their character with hollow mummery, hypocrisy, and deceit. There was one of the twelve apostles in particular, St. John the Evangelist, whom "Jesus loved," and who is described, on one memorable occasion, as "leaning on Jesus' bosom." (John i. 3—23.) Yet this distinction produced no ill blood among the rest. They steadily adhered to Jesus amidst a thousand hardships and privations. They were men, however; and, when a great multitude with swords and staves came to apprehend

him, and to take him before the chief priests and elders, they fled. One only, Peter, followed him afar off, and sat among the servants in the high priest's palace, to see the end. Even he, overcome with the general panic, denied his master. But presently after he repented, and went out and wept bitterly. Judas alone, who was a thief and bore the bag, and was a wretch of sordid soul, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. And even his conscience upbraided him, so that presently after the deed, he went and hanged himself.

There is a most pleasing story of mutual friendship between him and a family, consisting of a brother and two sisters, at Bethany, a village near Jerusalem. Mary, one of the sisters, had made herself remarkable by anointing Jesus with a "box of very precious ointment of spikenard, and wiping his feet with her hair." Lazarus, the brother, fell dangerously sick; and the sisters sent to Jesus, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." Jesus, however, did not arrive at the village till Lazarus was already dead and buried. The sisters met him as he approached, and led him by his desire to the grave; and when he saw the sisters, and the Jews who furnished the cavalcade, weeping, Jesus also groaned in spirit, and gave vent to his grief in a passion of tears. (John xi. 12, ff.)

These things occurred when Jesus himself was in a most perilous state from his enemies, and he was shortly after brought a prisoner to the high-priest, and from the

high-priest to Pilate. He was scourged and crowned with thorns, and cruelly mocked, and crucified; and, agreeably to a passage in one of the Jewish prophets, which was afterwards considered as fulfilled in him, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isaiah liii. 7.) /

But what is most remarkable is what followed on his death. He spent one year, or three, in forming his school, and training his disciples. It might naturally have been expected, that when, after so short a career, he was brought to trial, condemned to death, and ignominiously executed, the memory of his acts would speedily have passed away, and his followers have dispersed. But the very contrary happened. His religion rose like the phoenix from his ashes. His disciples during his lifetime manifested a very imperfect docility, and shewed that they entered but in a partial degree into the spirit of his teachings. When he was taken into custody, they all of them forsook him. And yet, as soon as he was no longer seen by them, they became heroes. They appeared to call to mind all his precepts. They regarded his actions and lessons with unalloyed admiration. He seemed as a God to them. This is what reflects the greatest lustre upon him. What must that man have been, whose instructions made so indelible an impression, and who, though for a time his seed seemed to have fallen in stony places, and among thorns, yet appeared in the sequel to have

changed the very nature of his followers, and to have penetrated them with a spirit which never after abandoned them?

The miracles of Jesus, like those of other men who have claimed for themselves the exercise of supernatural power, cannot without much difficulty be explained by men, "sitting below in a cooler element," and free from the fumes of credulity which obscured the senses of human beings through so many ages of the world. We only know that they saw things through any other medium rather than that of their sober senses, that they were juggled by tricks and legerdemain, and that for the most part they believed anything which with a certain solemnity they were required to believe. Personation and a certain carriage on the part of the actors were everything. When we take into account the pretended possession of the bodies of men by devils, their answering to their names, and their quitting the possessed at the command of him who assumed authority over them, we can have but little difficulty with the rest. With respect to the miracles of Jesus in particular, it is to be remembered that he required faith as an indispensable condition to the performance of a cure, that in Galilee he "did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief" (Matt. xiii. 58), and that he explained to his disciples that the reason why in some cases they could not cast out devils, was "because of their unbelief." (Matt. xvii. 20.)

The celebrated Woolston has satisfactorily exposed one by one the miracles of Jesus, and particularly the crowning miracle of his own resurrection. Woolston has mixed his argument, indeed, with a certain degree of banter and burlesque, without which it was perhaps impossible to do justice to his subject. And, as it is the principle of this volume to treat everything with decorum and sobriety, I willingly leave this question in his hands.

After all, the greatest difficulty would seem to be, to account for the behaviour of Jesus himself, and to explain the state of his mind with respect to the miracles he is said to have achieved. It is plain that his judgment and apprehension in this particular did not outrun those of the period in which he lived. We must surely do him the credit to persuade ourselves that he himself believed in the miracles, a faith in which he required from others. Man is a gregarious animal; and there are very few who can succeed in separating themselves from the prejudices and persuasion of the whole herd of mankind about them. Sir Thomas Brown and Sir Matthew Hale, in comparatively enlightened times, and so lately as the year 1664, entertained such a belief in witchcraft, as to have consented to the conviction and execution of two poor women accused of that imaginary crime.* What must have been the case, therefore, when no man

* "Lives of the Necromancers."

doubted or questioned the truth of these wretched tales? Unmingled hypocrisy is a very rare phenomenon in this sublunary state. The mind of the performer is no longer in its sober sense, but grows intoxicated in the midst of its operations. Jesus first persuaded himself of his divine mission, and his familiar intercourse with his heavenly Father. He apprehended that he was of some exalted and superhuman nature, without exactly defining what that nature was; and, having convinced himself of this, nothing subsequently became hard to him.

It is a gross mistake, which is commonly made, to regard impostors in matters of this sort, as profligate and unprincipled men. Valentine Greatrakes in England, in the reign of Charles the Second, accompanied his wonderful cures with devout and fervent prayer; and the celebrated Boyle gives him a very high character for virtue and piety. The same may be said of Prince Hohenlohe in our own times. These persons are frequently exemplary in their lives, and uncommonly serious, and in earnest in their dispositions and temper. They believe themselves the peculiar favourites of Heaven, and are singularly humble in their acknowledgments of the benevolence of the Most High vouchsafed to them, unworthy to have been selected for so distinguished an honour.

I come now, in the last place, to consider the dark side in the character of Jesus. Very early he appears to have thought of his present existence as marked for

adversity, and even seems to have had some glimpses of his fate, to be cut off from the earth by an iniquitous sentence. When he went up for the last time to Jerusalem, we are told that he intimated that he should "suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed." (Matt. xvi. 21.) This anticipation naturally gave a very grave cast to his feelings and discourse. Add to which he had an intimate persuasion of his mission, and that it was for great and mighty purposes that it was conferred on him.

Yet he was not altogether an ascetic. He says of himself, "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking; and they say, Behold, a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." (Matt. xi. 16—19.)

But, whatever were the habits of Jesus in the convivial scene, where he perhaps relaxed somewhat of his austerity, his general demeanour was fervent and severe. Agreeably to a passage in the Psalms, which the evangelist has applied to him, it might be said, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (Psalm lxix. 9; John ii. 17.) One extraordinary instance of this, which appears properly to fall under the chapter of fanaticism,

is where he "went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money, sitting; and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables." (John ii. 13—15.)

In the same manner his zeal was inflamed when he addressed the scribes and Pharisees, saying, "Wo unto you, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. . . . Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. xxiii. 27, ff.)

The indignation of Jesus was especially excited against those who were slow of heart to believe. He enquires of those who came to him for miraculous cures, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" (Matt. ix. 28.) And on another occasion he says, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you." (Matt. xvii. 20.) And to Thomas, called Didymus, one of the apostles, he is reported to have said, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John xx. 29.) All this is exceedingly suspicious. It is true that there have been instances of persons who have hardened themselves in

unbelief, or, more accurately speaking, who have shut their eyes against evidence ; but it is a more pitiable spectacle where men are blinded by credulity, and make a merit to themselves of believing with very imperfect evidence or none. The true nobility and independence of spirit is where we weigh evidence with a scrupulous nicety, and believe neither more nor less than we can clearly prove. There is therefore something strange and repulsive to such a spirit in the idea of ascribing merit to a hasty faith, that consists more in a subjection of the will than in any sound reasoning, or the enlightening of the understanding.

With such dispositions, and an impatience of everything that contravened his supposed divine mission, Jesus plentifully poured out his curses, or, in the Scripture language, his woes, upon the cities which shewed themselves refractory to his preaching. He compared them to all that is recorded as most profligate and abandoned in the Old Testament, and pronounced these his contemporaries to be sunk in a still deeper reprobation. "Wo unto thee, Chorazin ! wo unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be brought down to hell ; for if the mighty works which

have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." (Matt. xi. 20—24.) "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold! a greater than Jonas is here." (Matt. xii. 41.)

And, if these inferior places excited the indignation of Jesus, much more was it awakened against Jerusalem, the metropolis of his native country. To the men of his own city he cried, "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias. . . . Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come on this generation." (Matt. xxiii. 35, 36.) But as in his prediction he plainly confounds the anticipated destruction of Jerusalem with his own second coming and the end of the world, it is not easy to say which of the calamities that he dwells upon with so gratified a minuteness belong to the one, and which to the other.

Meanwhile, what should we think in any other case of a preacher, who delighted to predict the calamity here and hereafter of towns and cities, with their inhabitants, merely because they did not listen with so tractable a docility as he desired to the promulgation of his gospel?

The good feelings and impulses of the character of

Jesus occasionally shew themselves, in spite of the fierceness and intolerance of his zeal. Thus we find him breaking out into the pathetic exclamation: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. xxiii. 37.)

But, to sum up the whole question as to the views of Jesus Christ respecting the final fates of mankind, nothing can be more certain than that they were of the gloomiest description. One of his disciples having asked him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" his reply is, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." (Luke viii. 23, 24.) It is his Father's "little flock" to whom it is his good pleasure to give the kingdom (Luke xii. 32), while the mass of mankind are for ever excluded. These being figuratively divided into the sheep and the goats, the former go away into life eternal, and the latter into everlasting fire. Meanwhile, can anything so mark the ferocity of zeal in the Lord, the judge, as the terms in which the sentence is couched? Any one, it might be thought, who contemplated the punishment of everlasting burnings, and had personally before his eyes the miserable wretches upon whom this sentence was to be pronounced, would have felt his heart awed into a deep solemnity, and have been penetrated

with the dire necessity under which he laboured of giving it. He would have been struck with the unfitness of adding insult to unspeakable calamity. He could not have brought himself to aggravate the doom, as it stands in the text, with the fearful address, "Depart, ye cursed."

Another of the evangelists introduces Jesus three times in the course of six verses, as denouncing against the guilty, that they should be "cast into hell, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark ix. 44, ff.); hereby plainly manifesting the complacency with which he dwelt on the idea. Some sects of Christians have endeavoured, in opposition to the plain meaning of the expression, to mollify this sentence by saying, that *εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων*, which we translate, "for ever and ever," might more literally be rendered, "for ages of ages," and therefore does not necessarily signify a strict eternity. But Jesus in this passage puts it out of all doubt. "The fire that is not quenched," might mean a flame still burning, an awful monument of the punishment of those who had already been consumed in it. But "the worm that dieth not," will not admit of being thus explained away. Of what use is the "worm that dieth not," if his gnawings are not perpetually felt?

The doctrine of Jesus, therefore, respecting future punishments, represents God, the most perfect and the most merciful, infinitely removed from infirmity and passion, as taking eternal vengeance on the sins of man.

And what is man that he should be reserved for everlasting fire? "Man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm." (Job xxv. 6.) What can we perpetrate that can awaken the wrath of the Almighty? For it is not a few astonishing criminals that are in question; but, with few exceptions, the whole race of mankind. Alas! alas! what have we done?—frail creatures, of no more worth and estimation in the eyes of him, who "through vast immensity can pierce," than so many gnats and butterflies. In our little plans, or rather in our fantastic amusements, what commensurableness is there between the slight errors and the saucy petulancies of which we are guilty, and the dreadful expiation of everlasting fire? This is indeed to "break a butterfly upon a wheel," to light a conflagration powerful enough to consume a planetary system, for the purpose of annihilating a web of gossamer, the sport of every breathing of an idle wind. In fact, the greater part of our species pass their lives between compulsory labour and an unmeaning interchange of purposeless frivolities. Much of their time is in reality spent in acts of trivial kindness to each other, or in the small exertions necessary to their self-preservation; fatigued with which they lie down to sleep, that they may enter again refreshed upon the nothings of the succeeding day. And is it to be believed that such frail and feeble creatures should be destined to writhe in everlasting torments? that the forces of hell-fire should be

wasted on these? that thousands of millions of ages are to elapse, and their unspeakable miseries to be for ever new? For such is the doctrine of Jesus.

God is represented to us as for ever serene, enjoying an existence of uninterrupted complacency and happiness. "The Lord is full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." (Psalm lxxxvi. 15.) "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father." (Matt. x. 29.) And this God shall be everlastingly the spectator of the ineffable miseries of the creatures he has made. They "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." (Rev. xiv. 10.)

Tertullian, bishop of Carthage, one of the most eminent of the Fathers of the Church, who flourished about the close of the second century, had fully imbibed the spirit of the Christian faith. He writes thus in his book *De Spectaculis*, addressing the Pagans of his own time: "You are fond of spectacles; expect the greatest of all spectacles, the last and eternal judgment of the universe! How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many and so great kings, whose entrance into heaven was confidently affirmed, together with Jupiter himself and his whole conclave of gods, groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness! likewise magistrates, who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer fires than they ever kindled for the

Christians. How many sage philosophers, who persuaded themselves that they had no concern with God, that their souls would never transmigrate into other bodies, now blushing in red-hot flames with their deluded scholars. How many celebrated poets trembling before the judgment-seat, not of Minos, or of Rhadamanthus, but of Christ. How many tragedians, more tuneful now in the expression of their own sufferings. How many dancers, in a greater variety of attitudes in flames than they ever exhibited on earth for the amusement of a crowded audience. How many wrestlers, not displaying their proficiency before the spectators in a theatre, but tossed upon a tempestuous sea of liquid fire. And last, as first, those who blasphemed and raged against the name of the Lord, now overtaken with the requital of their iniquities."

ESSAY IX.

*ON THE HISTORY AND EFFECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN
RELIGION.* . .



ESSAY IX.

On the History and Effects of the Christian Religion.

THERE is an old and a homely proverb which says, "Man proposes ; but God disposes." This is a quaint way of conveying an important truth, which is, that man sees a very little way into the events of things, and that, with whatever wisdom and whatever benevolence he forms his plans and conceives to himself certain consequences, the event will not unfrequently fall out very different from, sometimes diametrically opposite to, what the projector designed. God being here understood to mean the total result of a vast combination of causes, of which the human agent often apprehends but a very small portion.

This was perhaps never more strikingly illustrated than in the case of the Christian religion.

Jesus appears to have contemplated a most benevolent project for the benefit of mankind. He saw in a great degree how widely the species was wandering

from the path of the high degree of excellence of which they are capable. He was born at a time when the world was sunk in a general gulf of degeneracy. The Jews, his countrymen, were enslaved under the rule of the Roman empire, a yoke which they regarded with the utmost abhorrence, but from which they had no power of emancipating themselves. Shut out therefore as they were from the path of a generous ambition, they wasted their activity in frivolous and dishonourable pursuits. The most considerable men among them were divided into two sects, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees distinguished themselves by lofty pretences to a superior purity. But all their ambition was exhausted in ostentation and formality. They "did their alms, that they might be seen of men." They "for a pretence made long prayers, and devoured widows' houses." They "made broad their phylacteries," that they might be admired by their countrymen for their superior sanctity. They "loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi." (Matt. vi. xxiii.) The Sadducees, on the contrary, were a sort of heretics. They "said that there was no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit." (Acts xxiii. 8.) They affected a gay and liberal character, and set themselves vehemently against the formality and ostentation of the Pharisees.

Meanwhile, the Romans from the republic had fallen

under the empire. They had subdued almost the whole known world by force of arms. They afford a singular instance of a race of men degenerated from the purest and loftiest character into what was singularly profligate. In their best days they manifested the most independent spirit anywhere upon record. They were simple and direct. They gloried in poverty, and were unassailable to corruption. They loved their country and the principles of liberty above all things, and sought for no personal indulgence beyond the consciousness of their patriotism and their integrity. But, after persisting long in this honourable career, one unhappy infirmity overturned all. They aspired to evince their superiority to the rest of the world by dint of arms. They conquered one nation and country after another, and acquired the wealth of the people they conquered. They became emasculate, and changed a character of illustrious poverty for that of enormous opulence. They sunk into the most disgraceful excesses of luxury and profusion. Of consequence, they became accessible to corruption in every form. And, as they never were a refined people, they had little to restrain them in proceeding from one extreme to the other.

Jesus, having first presented to his youthful observation a scene so foreign from the purity of his nature, began to meditate in his thoughts how all this might best be reversed, and how the energies of the human soul might be renovated, and applied to the best pur-

poses. Surrounded as he was with examples of the most loathsome corruption among the Romans, and with the hollow semblance of virtue on the one hand, and the most heartless scepticism on the other, among his countrymen, he formed in his mind a theory of moral perfection such as the world never saw, and felt confident that by its beauty alone it might be assured of becoming the object of universal adoration.

Jesus, however, did not stop at the love of virtue. The character of his mind was to a considerable degree atrabilious and saturnine. He was penetrated with a fervent passion against everything that he considered as vice. "The zeal" of the cause of God "had eaten him up." Hence he was unmeasured in his vituperation of the hypocrisies of the Pharisees ; hence he lost the equanimity of his spirit whenever he called to mind the hardness of heart (such he denominated it) of the cities and towns which listened not to his exhortations, and turned a deaf ear to his warnings. This was the temper best suited to one who apprehended himself to have received a mission from on High. "He that despiseth me, rejecteth him that sent me." (Luke x. 16.) If Jesus had not been somewhat of an ascetic, if he had not regarded with a holy horror those who were deaf to his admonitions, he could not have been so powerful a preacher as he proved himself. He that claims to be an apostle, (and Jesus was more than an apostle) must have nothing hesitating and indifferent about him. He must

have the spirit of a martyr. He must be ready to face all suffering, all ignominy, even death itself, for the sake of the cause in which he is engaged.

Jesus, therefore, was of the same mind as the royal monitor of the Jews, who says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." (Prov. i. 7.) He was copious and exuberant in his threats of the divine anger. No one before him was ever so emphatical in asserting the doctrine of everlasting torments in a future world. He dwells upon this position ambitiously and eagerly, and is never weary of repeating it. He tells his hearers again and again, as we have seen, that there are few that shall be saved, and that the rest of mankind are doomed to everlasting burnings.

When Jesus, and John the Baptist before him, cried out to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" they beat an alarm adapted to penetrate the souls of the most callous. When men were convinced of the certainty of these threatenings, they might well come in trembling, as the keeper of the prison at Philippi did, to Paul and Silas, and exclaim, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

It is difficult for us to frame an idea of the tone of mind which prevailed among the first followers of Jesus. He, as the apostle says, "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. i. 10.) He set before his hearers a blessing and a curse. They who

came to him with a teachable spirit, saw the strait gate and the narrow way which leadeth unto life, and the wide and the broad entrance which leadeth to destruction. They were like Stephen, the proto-martyr, who, we are told, at the moment of his destruction, "looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." (Acts vii. 55.) Everything with them was serious. They were brought into a preternatural frame of spirit, and found themselves perpetually environed with the four last things,—death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

It was one of the mightiest revolutions recorded in the history of the globe, when a small number of men from a despised race, came in the name of one who was "hanged on a tree," and went forth into the world to preach a new religion to all nations of the earth. When they discoursed of "righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come," their hearers "trembled." (Acts xxiv. 25.) Religion had hitherto sat comparatively loose on the thoughts of mankind. The polytheism of the nations of the earth had distracted their minds, and had in a certain degree turned what might otherwise have created astonishment and awe, into an amusement. The Jews, as taught by Moses, had looked only to temporal rewards and punishments, and had no thought of a future state. When Jesus, therefore, came inculcating the blessedness of the world to come, such as eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had it entered into the

heart of man to conceive, on the one hand, and everlasting burnings on the other, he excited all the strongest emotions of which our nature is susceptible, and made men feel the things of this world, which are but for a moment, as unworthy of regard, in comparison with the eternity of bliss or of woe which is to follow.

We regard these things with a certain degree of indifference. The good sense of the human mind teaches us the preposterousness of the idea, that the great Father of us all, who dispassionately surveys the creatures He has made, should doom any—and much less the greater part of mankind—to live for ever the victims of unmitigated torment. We find our apprehension incommensurate to such a view of things. In the cool review that we take of these doctrines, our mind refuses to admit them as descriptive of realities. The majority of the inhabitants of Christian countries confess them with their mouths, but deny them in their hearts.

But it was otherwise in the dawn of the gospel. When these views of a future state were first declared to mankind; when these denunciations were thundered in the ears of men by Jesus and his apostles; when, as it appeared to the bystanders, the truth of the doctrine was confirmed by many and stupendous miracles, all persons, except such as retained their sobriety in the midst of a contagious delusion, or who contented themselves with deriding what their neighbours considered as

most serious, received the doctrine into their inmost hearts. They exclaimed with consternation to "Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts ii. 37.)

To the proper apostolic age succeeded a period, when literature and the due cultivation of the mind were banished from the world. There was scarcely such a thing as reason and sound logic anywhere to be found. Men were blinded by superstition, and victims of the grossest credulity. The ghosts of the departed perpetually walked the earth; and there was scarcely a man that had not seen them. Omens and prognostications governed the world. Sorcery and the black art were trades that thrived beyond all others. When judgment and good sense were banished from among mankind, the doctrine of eternal torments found good acceptance. The mind of man did not revolt from the idea that our "almighty and most merciful Father" should inflict them without remorse and mitigation. Whatever men heard from their spiritual instructors, they admitted without examination and scruple. These were the days when the mass of the people, and indeed all without distinction, were prepared, according to the Scripture phrase, to "swallow a camel."

Every threatening, therefore, denounced in the Bible, and that was duly repeated to them from the sacerdotal chair, was understood literally. They did not listen to them, like Gallio in the Acts of the Apostles, who cared

for none of these things ; but meditated on them daily, and they became the subject of their nightly visions. The thought poisoned to them all that was naturally refreshing and agreeable in life. They used this world as though they used it not ; they felt themselves as “pilgrims and strangers on earth” (Heb. xi. 13), and confessed that they had here “no continuing city.” (Heb. xiii. 14.)

Jesus, therefore, by straining his system in one point beyond all just proportion, in a great degree contributed to reverse the effect which he most zealously designed. He taught the most perfect disinterestedness and self-denial. “The Son of Man had not where to lay his head.” (Matt. viii. 20.) When he sent out his disciples to preach, he commanded them to “provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in their purses, nor scrip for their journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves.” (Matt. x. 9, 10.) And, after the death of Jesus, his apostles made a short experiment of the principle, that no one should say, “that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common.” (Acts iv. 32.) And yet, after the lapse of a few centuries, the Christian Church grew up into an enormous system, such as the heart of man had never before conceived—a vast hierarchy, which trod on the necks of princes, which made and unmade kings at their pleasure, which centred a great part of the wealth of the world in their persons, which overspread all Christian

countries with churches, and cathedrals, and episcopal palaces, and mitred abbeys, and monasteries and friaries, "eremites and friars, white, black, and grey, with all their trumpery." Whence came this unparalleled revolution?

Principally from the doctrine of "everlasting burnings." The believers of the sacred volume of the New Testament in the first ages did not, as now, "wear their rue with a difference," and put on the uniform of Christianity to be worn "as easy as a glove," fitting it to an infinite variety of glosses and interpretations at their pleasure. Heaven with them was heaven, and hell was hell, in the obvious meaning of the words. They understood the punishments of the future world as plain, material fire, to be suffered through thousands of millions of ages by the great mass of mankind, while a "remnant only should be saved." Of consequence, the vision of these terrific menaces haunted their nightly slumbers, and poisoned all their enjoyments.

There is a passage in the Gospels respecting which one wonders how it got there, and what was intended by it. One would suspect that it was an interpolation of after ages; but that, I believe, no ancient manuscript of the New Testament is to be found without. Jesus says to one of his apostles, by the aid of a wretched pun, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock [*ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ*] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever

thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. xvi. 18, 19.) What Jesus intended by this speech it is difficult to say, but the Church of Rome has found in it an invaluable legacy. They make Peter the first Christian bishop of Rome, and the gift of the keys to be the portion of all his successors.

The believers, as I have said, in the first ages of the Christian Church, understood the denunciations of the New Testament literally, and scarcely entertained a question that all mankind, with the exception only of a small remnant, are reserved for everlasting burnings. There were many, no doubt, that fully persuaded themselves that they were among the exceptions, that God in Christ was fully reconciled to them, that they were heirs of glory, "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17); as the majority perhaps of executed murderers and felons persuade themselves at this day. But all men are not thus gifted with the "grace of assurance." The modest and diffident are haunted with the "affliction of these terrible dreams, which shake them nightly," and will even intrude in the midst of their choicest recreations. They bitterly feel that it is of no use to lull themselves in fancied security, which will only make their resurrection in a future world, when they shall for ever find they were deceived, the more fearful. They assuredly believe that "there is no work nor device in the grave." (Eccles. ix. 10.)

Here, then, we are furnished with an ample basis for the enormous superstructure of priestcraft. All those who felt deeply what a vast issue they had at stake, were earnestly desirous to find some tangible authority to which they could appeal, an infallible judge of controversies; some one that should be to them in the place of God, who could assure them of safety, and confirm to them their title to the rest that remaineth to the blessed hereafter. The more they distrusted the frailty of their own judgment, the more they were struck with the necessity of having some visible judge to whose decision they could resort. And the first appeal that offered itself was to the clergy generally—men set apart to the service of God, and from whom they were accustomed to learn the expounding of the divine oracles.

“Confess your faults one to another,” says the apostle, “and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.” (James v. 16.) How much more satisfactory to have some supposed holy man at hand, whose calling it was to hear the confessions of all secular persons! This was in no length of time digested according to the rules of art. The confessor sat in a box apart, where he could neither see nor be seen by his penitent. The penitent fell on his knees and disburthened his soul of those offences which sat most heavily on his heart. The confessor exhorted him as he went on, and propounded to him questions. To render the confession unreserved,

it became necessary that the confessor should be bound to the most inviolable secrecy. If the penitent charged himself with murder or incest, he felt secure that his confession should never be brought in evidence against him. He spoke with the same security as if the communication had only been between himself and his own soul. The seal of secrecy was in some cases removed; but this was only in some very extraordinary emergency, and it was so rare as not to infringe upon the general confidence that the penitent felt in disclosing what oppressed him most.

To render this institution complete, most satisfactory to the penitent, and beneficial to the Church, it was soon found necessary to add certain other provisions, such as penance and absolution. The confessor prescribed to the penitent certain rigorous observances,—fasting, abstinence from savoury food, the repetition of prayers and humiliation, the wearing of sackcloth, and occasionally flagellation.

After a due course of penance, the priest pronounced *ex cathedrâ* the form of absolution, and assured the penitent, in the name of his Creator and Redeemer, that his sins were forgiven him. This, as we have seen, was confirmed by Jesus to Peter, where he says, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shalt be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. xvi. 18, 19.) This is very

strong and precise language ; and whether we understand it of the bishops of Rome and those to whom they delegated their authority, or of the clergy generally, it became afterwards of exceeding weight and importance.

It was the authoritative pronouncing of the sentence of absolution that filled up the measure of this function. The priest-ridden penitent, having been officially reconciled by one of God's consecrated ministers and mediators, felt his heart lightened, and went on his way rejoicing. The flames of the infernal pit could no longer singe him. "Upon their bodies the fire had no power, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of fire passed upon them." How infinite the difference between the poor penitent, who had "shut the door of his closet, and prayed to his Father which is in secret," and hoped that his sin was forgiven him, but had received no sign, on the one hand, and him, on the other, who heard the voice of the man of God absolving him, and perhaps had felt his holy hand pouring the oil of salvation on his head ! Sometimes, in addition, the dying man was attired in monastic vestments, rendering it impossible that in that habit the devil should approach him to lay hands on his shivering soul.

The poor man, thus rescued from hell, felt his gratitude to the Church unbounded for so inestimable a benefit. What was wife or children when brought into competition with the salvation of his soul ? He would, therefore, often

strip his surviving relatives of every farthing that was to have descended to them, that he might enrich the Church, and be a founder of chapels and monasteries, and sacred edifices of every possible species.

But the most memorable and productive invention of these times was purgatory. The Scriptures plainly divided the fates of mankind in a future state into two, everlasting and inexpressible blessedness in heaven, or eternal damnation in hell. This alternative, in a period when everything was implicitly believed that issued from a high authority, was found too intolerable. Irreversible damnation for trivial sins was too dreadful to be anticipated with calmness. According to this doctrine, every individual must at once either be admitted to the beatific vision of his Maker, or be consigned to a state of eternal torments. There were but few that could think themselves entitled to everlasting joys, and the rest were to expect irretrievable perdition and misery hereafter.

The priesthood, however, found out an interval between death and the general resurrection upon which to erect a scheme. Upon the general resurrection of mankind ensued the day of final judgment. The Scriptures seem to have filled up the period between death and the resurrection with what theologians have called the "sleep of the soul." "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth." (John v. 28, 29.) The priesthood fixed on this period as convenient for penal and puri-

fying fires. They said that there were very few souls so perfect at the period of death as to be worthy of immediate admission to the joys of heaven. They divided the sins of men into two classes, venial and mortal. For the latter there was no hope, "but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Heb. x. 27.) But for the former they held it to be unreasonable that for every idle word which, we are told, shall be brought into judgment, men should be damned for ever, and without remedy. For souls, then, which lay chargeable with smaller offences, they held that a smaller penalty might be sufficient; and they decided that the purification of such souls was to be by fire.

In these days of terror the imaginations of the superstitious fixed upon *Ætna*, *Vesuvius*, and other volcanic scenes as the probable places of punishment. Terrified men, in the midst of the roarings of these mountains, conceived that they heard the shrieks and wailings of souls in torture. Nothing could be more fearful than the idea of such things being actually brought home to the senses of the living. Shakespear has given an impressive picture of souls in purgatory, such as only Shakespear was capable of giving :—

———— " But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,

Thy knotted and combinèd locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood."

Nothing could have been more advantageous to the clergy than this doctrine of purgatory. The human soul is most peculiarly susceptible at the hour that our friends are taken from us by death. Time is the healer of all griefs, and the minister of oblivion. But at first our hearts are melted towards those we have lost. The purgation, we are told, is by fire. There are comparatively very few persons who quit this terrestrial abode so spotless as not to stand in need of some purification. The direct mode, we are told, of shortening this disastrous period, is by prayer, and particularly the prayers of the Church. These prayers were usually accompanied by the mass, the sacrifice of the body of Jesus afresh, by way of expiation for the sins of the departed.

It is not certain at what time the doctrine of purgatory was first introduced into the Christian Church. St. Austin and St. Jerome prayed for the souls of the departed, the one for his mother, the other for his wife, whom at the same time, with an amiable inconsistency, they already represented as participating of the joys of heaven. They were not certain, however, whether some soil of human infirmity might not still adhere to these excellent women; and, for fear of the worst, they prayed that God would remit to them the penalty of these minor

sins. Pope Gregory the Great, in the close of the sixth century, first made the doctrine of purgatory a regular part of the code of Christianity, and established the practice of masses for the dead upon an extensive scale.

This doctrine produced a memorable revolution in the system of the Christian faith. Instead of leaving the article of a future state as Jesus had left it, with the tremendous and terrific announcement, "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation" (John v. 28, 29); in conformity to which the infinitely larger portion of mankind were reserved for everlasting fire,—the believer in purgatory left only those who were under mortal sin, murderers, incestuous persons, and such like, to the punishment of hell, for whom little pity was felt, and whose care concerned but few, while the generality of the human race whose sins were venial, were doomed only to purifying fires, and might hope, after a certain time, that their sins would be forgiven them, and their souls be admitted to the society of the spirits of just men made perfect.

Enough, however, of the terrible was left, even by this scheme, to satisfy any reasonable appetite for horror. The purification, it was universally admitted, was to be by fire, and that the friends we loved and had lost should, after the checkered, and often the painful scenes of this

mortal life, be consigned, for a term of years, to torture, was no consolatory thought, even if after this period they should be admitted to the joys of the blessed. According to Dante, the infirmities of this life were to be visited with appropriate sufferings ; the miser, the intemperate man, and the sensualist were to abide a penalty that should most acutely remind of their offences on earth. Very few persons were so faultless as not to be subjected to some expiation, till the frailties, "done in their days of nature, were burned and purged away."

It is difficult to think of an institution more consonant to the genuine sentiments of human nature than that of masses for the dead, When I have lost a dear friend and beloved associate, my friend is not dead to me. The course of nature may be abrupt ; but true affection admits of no sudden breaks. I still see my friend ; I still talk to him. I consult him in every arduous question ; I study in every difficult proceeding to mould my conduct to his inclination and pleasure. Whatever assists this beautiful propensity of the mind, will be dear to every feeling heart. In saying masses for the dead, I sympathise with my friend. I believe that he is anxious for his salvation ; I utter the language of my anxiety. I believe that he is passing through a period of trial and purification ; I also am sad. It appears as if he were placed beyond the reach of my kind offices ; this solemnity once again restores to me the opportunity of aiding him. The world is busy and

elaborate to tear him from my recollection ; the hour of this mass revives the thought of him in its tenderest and most awful form. My senses are mortified that they can no longer behold the object of their cherished gratification ; but this disadvantage is mitigated, by a scene of which my friend is the principle and essence, presented to my senses.

It being decided that the purification is by fire, renders it most urgent upon me that I should suffer no delay, and permit no contrary avocation to thwart my resolution, when the question is of withdrawing a person I love from "this place of torment."

The price of masses for the dead was fixed by a certain tariff. Five hundred or a thousand masses were to be purchased at a given sum. Masses were sometimes directed to be said to the end of time. And it was an ignoble and a sordid spirit that would stay and count the cost in a question of such paramount urgency. And this was specially the case when the person who directed the cost was the dying man himself. Well, therefore, might Leo X. exclaim, as he is said to have done, "What a profitable fable has this of Jesus Christ proved to us !"

Hence we see how the doctrines of Christianity, in a manner so totally opposite to the intentions of its founder, produced, in their unavoidable operation, so gigantic a tree, spreading its mighty branches on every side, "so that the birds of the air came to lodge" under

its protection. These doctrines, together with the celibacy of the clergy, another profound reach of policy, reducing this vast body of men under one spiritual head, constituted a scheme most difficult to be uprooted ; so that, when the Reformation came and diminished the power and glory of the Catholic Church in so many important points, yet Christianity, under different forms, still survived the shock.

Many of the predictions of Jesus have proved marvelously true. He was no doubt endowed with a surprising degree of sagacity. Thus he prophesied that his Church, in his language, "the kingdom of heaven," should overspread many countries ; and it has been even so. Thus he said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matt. x. 34.) One would have thought that, so meek and quaker-like as were the habits of Jesus and his first followers, they could by no possibility have produced such a result. And yet nothing can be more strikingly true than this prediction has proved.

In the first place, the Christian religion is wholly opposite in spirit to all the religions of the heathen world. They easily accommodated themselves to each other. The Romans ever found, in the countries they conquered, gods who, under different names, had the same provinces and attributes with their own. As most of their gods had only a limited and local power, there was nothing in their theology incompatible with the

admitting other gods into participation and society with their own. But the religion of the Jews and Christians was essentially intolerant. They taught the worship of one God, and that there was no other God beside him. They placed idolatry as the most enormous of sins ; and the first Christians manifested a delight in profaning the temples and throwing down the altars of the heathen deities. They therefore courted the crown of martyrdom. Beside the general abhorrence of polytheism, they were persuaded that the heathen gods were devils in disguise, escaped from the infernal pit.

The religions of the heathen world consisted principally in the practice of certain observances and ceremonies, and made them appeal to the senses. They do not obviously lead to debates and hostility of one religion to another. But the Christian religion is a religion of faith and dogmas. The opposite opinions of predestination and free-will, of faith and works, of a particular and a general providence, not to mention the disputes about the dignity, person, and offices of the Saviour, have their seeds in the New Testament itself ; and as faith is represented in it of so paramount importance, this unavoidably led to the engendering much pertinaciousness and bitterness of controversy. Heresies of course multiplied without number ; and infinite industry was employed in the condemnation of error, and the maintaining the purity of the general creed. All this produced some good effects, in sharpening the intellectual

powers, and rendering the professors exceedingly acute in the pursuit and application of logical distinctions. But it did also much harm. Men, who were bitter and earnest in disputation, would not always content themselves with using the weapons of reason, but would sometimes employ those of a less ambiguous character.

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth : thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.” (Exodus xx. 4, 5.) This is the second commandment of the Decalogue. Nothing could be more obvious than this among the Jews, who worshipped one supreme God, the omnipresent Spirit that pervades the universe ; and this served especially to distinguish the Jewish people from the idolatrous nations of the rest of the world. The simplicity of the primitive Christians taught them also to adhere rigidly in this respect to the precept of Moses. The religions of the rest of mankind had the outward symbols of idolatry, and the Fathers of the Christian Church were copious in their indignation against such worship.

But in proportion as the heathen religions disappeared from the civilized world, the temper of the followers of Jesus altered. The Jews worshipped an omnipresent God, and him only. But, among Christians, the son of God, the “ express image of his person ” (Heb. i. 3), had appeared in human form ; and the saints and martyrs,

the legitimate successors of the inferior gods of the Greeks and Romans, were honoured at their tombs, and miracles were wrought by their relics. It was, therefore, almost unavoidable that images of Jesus and his saints should be set up in Christian churches, and that divine honours should be paid to them.

Here, then, we are presented with a memorable occasion of divisions in the Christian Church, between those who adhered to the Mosaic dispensation and the first followers of Jesus on the one hand, and the partisans of a more ornamented Christianity, which shewed itself in the midst of worldly opulence and power, on the other. We know not exactly by what degrees the use of images in Christian worship first crept in, but it was, perhaps, to be expected that the more pure and rigorous of the followers of Jesus should take exceptions at so palpable an innovation. And it unfortunately happened that the most direct way in which these men could manifest their disapprobation, was one in the highest degree offensive and shocking to those they opposed. Accordingly, we find among the first examples of this spirit the demolition of an image of Jesus which had been placed over one of the gates of the city of Constantinople. These sects became afterwards distinguished by the names of Iconolatrians and Iconoclasts, the worshippers and the breakers of images.

Several successive emperors of Constantinople are numbered among the latter. Leo Isauricus, the first, of

them, in the beginning of the eighth century promulgated an edict forbidding the use of images in public worship, and engaged in a cruel persecution against those who disobeyed it. In one instance he is said to have by night burned twelve eminent ecclesiastics in their houses for this offence. Constantine Copronymus, his son, we are told, put to death two bishops, and many clergy and monks, after having exposed them to every sort of ignominy, for the like cause.

But the ultimate results of this division among Christians were still more memorable. No sooner was the edict of Leo Isauricus published in Italy, than it seemed to serve as a signal for the revolt of that part of the world against the sovereignty of the Emperor of Constantinople. Leo sent his fleets and armies to subdue the revolters, but in vain. The Italians were fired with an inextinguishable zeal in behalf of the holy images of the crucified Jesus, of his virgin mother, and of the saints. The cause was everywhere victorious. And the temporal powers of the popes was founded upon the expulsion of the representatives of the Emperor of the East. After some vicissitudes, and the successful interposition of Pepin and Charlemagne in behalf of the liberty of Italy, the latter of these princes was finally in the year 800 crowned in Rome Emperor of the West; and all these revolutions were in the first instance produced by the ecclesiastical dispute of the worshippers and the breakers of images. The triumph, however, of the

image-breakers in the East was short; and, after some struggle, the cause of orthodoxy was as completely successful at Constantinople as it had been at Rome.

While Charlemagne was thus engaged in a pious enterprise in behalf of the Romish Church, he was, at the same time, or a little before, employed in a war against the Saxons, and his campaign was terminated with a bloody battle, in which the Saxons were defeated, and the war was closed by their general and his followers being led to the sacred font, and publicly professing themselves converts to the Christian faith.

The eleventh century was marked with the establishment of those two cardinal dogmas, transubstantiation and the celibacy of the clergy,—the one subduing all human sense and reason at the foot of mystery and implicit faith, and the other creating to the sovereign pontiff an immense army of resolute adherents, dispersed through every region of Christendom, yet detached from all the ties of country, domestic affection, and nature. This was the period in which the Bishop of Rome openly assumed to himself the power of creating and deposing kings, of setting subjects free from the bond of allegiance, and of subjecting the most exalted personages to the basest and most abject penance.

The close of this century witnessed the most extraordinary scene of human enthusiasm and extravagance that is upon record in the history of mankind. Everything connected with the Saviour of the world, the

co-eternal son of the co-eternal Father, was at this time regarded with the most prostrate adoration. The soil which Jesus had trod, God and man mystically united in one person ; the city in which he resided, Calvary, the hill which had witnessed his last agonies and his death, were the spots towards which all pious hearts were drawn with a magnetic power. Penance was in special acceptance at this time, and pilgrimages were particularly in vogue. But of all pilgrimages, that which commanded the highest preference was that to the tomb where the body of Jesus had once been repositied.

These scenes and this tomb were now under the rule of the detested followers of Mahomet. Pilgrims still turned their steps that way, and for a time were allowed to practise their devotions unmolested. The Mahometans, however, looked on this concourse with an evil eye, and at last went so far as to prohibit it, or to accompany its celebration with every kind of molestation and vexation.

At length, the indignation of the Christian world was wrought up to its height, and they thought how foul was the disgrace that these hallowed scenes should be under the sceptre of the infidels. They resolved on one united effort to free the sacred spot from dishonour. Thousands and tens of thousands marched from many kingdoms on this project. The many lands and seas that were to be traversed did but the more inflame their zeal. The greatness of their devotion did but the more

excite them to make light of all obstacles, and to omit every precaution and preparation that might be required to insure their success. They blackened like locusts every region that lay in their way. The Greek emperors were alarmed at the inundation, and devised every means in their power to arrest its progress. The waste of human life amidst the obstacles that occurred was enormous. They perished by ambuscades, by treacherous information, by inhospitable climates, and by famine.

From the commencement of Christianity there started up a variety of sects, who mutually condemned and often persecuted each other. Opposing creeds and articles of religion were perpetually at war. The faculty of disputation was sharpened; but the charity and good-will of professing Christians towards each other were greatly diminished. St. Epiphanius in the fourth century wrote an account of four-score heresies. Moreri reckons up two hundred and seventy-five.

One of the most memorable of these heresies was that of the Paulicians, so called because they adhered to the writings of the Apostle Paul, to the rejection of the Old Testament, and the exclusion of the other writers of the New. They are said to have held the doctrine of two principles, the one the author of all good, the other of evil, in this assimilating themselves to the creed of Zoroaster. They rejected images and relics, and in many distinguishing points inclined more to the dictates of reason than to the suggestions of mystery. They denied

transubstantiation, and in their practices leaned to the side of simplicity and self-denial. Their modes were little in accord with the growing opulence and magnificence of the Church. They were on several occasions confounded with the Iconoclasts. They were persecuted by successive Greek emperors, and the panegyrist of the Empress Theodora have boasted, that about the year 845 she caused one hundred thousand Paulicians to perish by the sword, the gibbet, or the flames.

Under the severity of these persecutions the Paulicians disappeared from the Eastern world ; but, after a lapse of more than three centuries, the same principles, with little variation, discovered themselves in the fruitful plains of Languedoc. Their followers were termed Albigenses, from the town of Albi, in that province, round which they principally dwelt. They held, as their predecessors had done, the hostility of matter and spirit, that the good principle was the author of the latter, and the evil principle of the former. They taught, therefore, that Christ was only in appearance made flesh, and only seemed to be crucified. They enjoined the maceration of the body, and propagated sentiments so simple and self-denying as made them a living satire upon the corruption and luxury of the Court of Rome. They stripped Christianity of the magnificence of practice, and the mystery of doctrines, with which it had long been invested. They were therefore visited with the fierce animosity of the visible

head of the Church. Pope Innocent the Third even exceeded in his cruelties the Empress Theodora. He organised a crusade against the Albigenses under Simon Montfort, who pursued them with fire and sword. The tribunal of the Inquisition, guided by Dominic de Gusman, was first instituted against the unhappy adherents of this sect. Thus proceeded against, they speedily disappeared from Languedoc, and took refuge in the mountains of Savoy and Piedmont.

At length the Protestant Reformation burst out upon the Christian world. Its adherents saw the corruptions of the Church of Rome in all their native deformity. They freed themselves from the worship of images, transubstantiation, purgatory, and auricular confession. They affirmed that the Pope was antichrist, and that the Church of Rome was the scarlet whore whose name was "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev. xvii. 5); but they were too deeply imbued with the creed of Christianity to be able altogether to cast off its yoke. They retained the humiliation and abjectness of the system, and, most of all, the belief of everlasting torments for the greater part of mankind in a future state.

At first, one-half of the kingdoms of Europe appeared prepared to cast off the yoke of the Roman Catholic faith. No wonder that the Pope and general hierarchy of Christendom became alarmed. The popish persecutions form a sanguinary page in this period of history. For some

time before, the punishment of burning alive was judged peculiarly fitted for heretics. There was a striking analogy between the punishment in the present world and the flames of hell, which, without doubt, were the doom of heretics in the world to come, rendering the one the fitting prelude to the other. Under Queen Mary of England, five bishops, twenty-one clergymen, and two hundred and fifty private individuals, including women and children, underwent this penalty in three years. In the Netherlands, it is computed by the most unquestionable authority, that fifty thousand persons were hanged, beheaded, buried alive, and burned, on the score of religion alone. The Huguenots of France were the subjects of unrelenting persecution; and by these means the spread of Protestantism was reduced within narrower limits than had at first been apprehended.

Luther had observed a certain degree of moderation and policy in his proceedings; but so violent a shock could not be given to the deep-rooted prejudices of mankind without producing consequences the most unreasonable and extravagant. Among others, Thomas Muncer, an Anabaptist, a native of Thuringia in Germany, assembled a multitude of followers, alleging that the disciples of Jesus ought to have no magistracy, no inequalities of rank, and no private property; and having endeavoured to reduce these principles to practice, Moreri says that his insurrection was not subdued but at the expense of more than one hundred thousand lives.

Muncer was put to death in 1525. Some time after this, John Boccold, commonly known by the appellation of Jack of Leyden, a tailor, advancing similar principles, contrived to make himself master of the town of Munster, and having married fourteen wives, and committed a thousand extravagances, was defeated by a league of the princes of Germany, and put to death with the most exquisite tortures, all of which he bore with astonishing fortitude, at the age of twenty-six. This happened in the year 1535.

The contention between the Catholics and Protestants of France gave occasion to repeated assassination and much bloodshed. The first assassination was that of Francis, Duke of Guise, under the walls of Orleans, which were defended against him by the Protestants. The perpetrator was Poltrot, a Protestant; and the assassination was effected in 1563. This was followed by the assassinations of Henry III. and Henry IV. of France, perpetrated by Clement and Ravaillac, popish fanatics.

But the most lamentable scene was executed in 1572, known by the appellation of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. This was effected under cover of a marriage between the King of Navarre, afterwards Henry IV., and Margaret, daughter of Henry II. Charles, the ninth brother to the princess, took an open part in the massacre. It was perpetrated in the middle of the night, the Protestants being taken unprepared, and

many of them slain in their beds. Ten thousand Protestants were thus put to death in Paris alone ; and of these, five hundred noblemen and gentlemen.

But a scene surpassing this in atrocity, and which the human imagination can scarcely conceive, was that of the Gunpowder Treason in England in the year 1605. The immediate agent in the business was Guy Fawkes, an individual actuated by a frantic zeal for the religion in which he had been educated. He concealed thirty-six barrels of gunpowder in a cellar under the House of Lords, and it was intended that, when James the First with the Lords and Commons were assembled for opening the Parliament, the whole should explode, and blow all these persons up in the air. It was prevented by a search that was made on the night preceding the assembly.

Many, however, of the most important effects of Christianity, cannot be reduced to the heads of an historical enumeration. They operate silently, and can only be brought to account by a review upon a large scale. The question is, what the human race would have been without Christianity. It has probably been of some service to mankind, as having in a certain degree sharpened our intellectual faculties by the appetite for disputation, and the lust for creeds and articles, which it has propagated upon earth. This is, perhaps, the whole of what can justly be conceded.

It has imposed a tissue of falsehood upon the human

mind for eighteen hundred years ; nor do we yet see when the imposture will be at an end. Error cannot take a lasting hold upon man with impunity. Oh, when shall the mind of man again be free, shake off the chains that fasten it to its dungeon, and soar unrestrained in its native element ? Who can tell, in the revolution of eighteen hundred years, what wonders it might not have effected ?

But Christianity is the nightmare that has pressed down all its exertions, and paralysed its articulations.

In the first and foremost place, we have always to consider its denunciations of everlasting punishment. What a spring of inestimable price there must be in the mind, that has enabled it, in spite of this infernal pressure, to effect all the admirable things that in the revolutions of these centuries have been realised ! The threat has gone forth into all the world. The unequivocal language of the Christian Scriptures is, that the whole of mankind, except a select few, shall be punished after death with inexpressible torments, which shall know neither mitigation nor end. It is fortunate for us that there is so much incredulity in the world.

The atrocious nature of the menace in some degree operates its own cure. The faculties of man cannot be reduced to believe in so monstrous an absurdity. But though the wounds inflicted upon our spirit are for this reason not mortal, yet with what frightful scars must it not be trenched ? The idea, once truly impressed, can

scarcely by any means be obliterated. Death is the "bourne from which no traveller returns." "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot." (Luke xvi. 26.) All is silence in the grave. The moment that the spirit has passed from this mortal frame, all communication is cut off. With whatever arguments we may fortify ourselves against the terrors of hereafter, we can never arrive at a sensible demonstration.

There are doubtless all degrees of faith among nominal Christians, from that so terrible that it drives our reason from its genuine seat in the brain, to that which in its gayer moods laughs at these imaginary dreams. But the arrow still sticks in the wounded ribs. The sound still rings in our ears. Who shall say that the man who has once been visited with these terrors, will ever be in all respects the same man as he would have been, if his soul had never been laid prostrate by them?

They operate in different degrees upon different men. With the majority they do not prevent us from taking a deep interest in the affairs of this transitory life. With an inconsistency, perhaps, inseparable from the nature of the human mind, we occupy ourselves earnestly with a thousand frivolities, while for aught we know the furnace is heating seven times hotter than anything ever known upon earth, which is, not to consume us, but to torment us to all eternity.

Many men laugh these things off amidst the busy

turmoil of the world, who are terribly visited by the recollection of them in solitude and in the hours of darkness. They press upon such persons with terrible energy in a period of calamity, when exposed to the clouds of adversity, in sickness and the near approach of death. It is true that, when we draw towards the close of our mortal life, men are much less frequently exposed to these visitations of remorse, and "a certain fearful looking for of judgment," than might have been expected. But we anticipate this crisis frequently with terrible alarms; and no man knows how it will fare with him, when his time shall come. Death is at any rate an awful change, and there is no need that its evils should be aggravated with the additional mischiefs of superstition.

The threats of everlasting punishment in hell are no doubt the cardinal mischief, the crying and irreparable evil, of the Christian religion. The next seems to be the humility, carried to so extravagant a degree—the "poor-ness of spirit," as Jesus has thought proper to designate it, which it inculcates. Nothing can certainly be more absurd, than the man who "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God and is worshipped, who as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." Man is but a "worm." "Dust he is, and unto dust he shall return." Presumption and arrogance, therefore, in so frail a being, are to the utmost degree contemptible. Yet a well-considered conscious-

ness of that, whether in understanding or virtue, of which we are capable, is inseparable from true excellence. We should, as the apostle says, though in express contradiction to the precepts of his Master, "not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but soberly." (Romans xii. 3.) This is the truest worship and gratitude towards that mysterious, inexplicable power which has made us what we are.

Moses, when he concludes his account of the creation of the earth, its productions and inhabitants, says, "God saw everything He had made, and behold it was very good." (Gen. i. 31.) Nothing can be more obvious now than that there is much evil mixed with the good. The oldest solution of this phenomenon probably is the doctrine that there are a good and an evil principle perpetually at work in the world, and incessantly striving for the mastery. Moses's own solution is perhaps beyond all others the most incongruous and unsatisfactory. He teaches that everything was faultless and pure, till God communicated to the first man an arbitrary command, which he almost immediately disobeyed. The consequence was a severe sentence pronounced upon Adam, which was plainly designed to extend to all his race. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Gen. iii. 17, ff.)

The doctrine of Moses on this head is exceedingly expanded by the subsequent writers of the Old Testament, and still more by the writers of the New. They represent man, in consequence of the fall of Adam, not only condemned to misfortune and labour, but also as incapable of proceeding in the paths of virtue, and continually prone to disobey the laws of morality and God. Hence we are all of us offenders in the sight of the Almighty. Of consequence, that God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, regards us with displeasure, and pronounces upon us a sentence of condemnation. Conformably to this state of things, the Church of England daily calls on all its disciples to confess their sins in the strongest terms.

Be it observed, that this confession is put into the mouths indiscriminately of all who join in the forms of Christian worship. "No flesh shall be justified in the sight of God." "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before Him." (Rom. iii. 19, 20.)

It might, perhaps, be supposed that this was a mere mode of expression, intended only to convey an idea of the littleness of man, in comparison with the perfections of the Creator of the universe; just as before Eastern monarchs every subject is expected to prostrate himself, and employ the language of the most abject humility. But it is no such thing. Every one of us is bound to acknowledge that he has done that which deserves the

wrath of God for evermore, and that it is merely of His sovereign grace that He remits to us our manifold transgressions. This is indeed a levelling principle which destroys all distinction between right and wrong, between conduct the most flagitious and the most exemplary.

Let us take by way of illustration the instance of our illustrious Alfred, the almost incredible ornament of the dark pages of our annals. He found, in the beginning of his reign, his country overrun by the barbarous Danes, and was driven to hide himself in an obscure retreat in the Isle of Athelney. With infinite skill and inexhaustible courage he drove them out, and reduced his whole kingdom under one rule. He found his subjects full of rapine and disorder, and, by judicious regulations, brought them into a state of unexampled peace and security. He instituted or revived trial by jury, and the system of a representative legislature. He united the highest capacity for science with the most shining talents for action. He divided each day into three parts, allowing himself eight hours for sleep and the refectation of his body, eight for the despatch of business, and eight for study and devotion. In short, he was the model of what philosophers have been fond of delineating under the idea of a perfect prince.

Alfred was a Christian, and one of his modes of civilizing the Danes, was by inducing them to adopt the ceremony of baptism and the profession of Christianity. Alfred, therefore, we must suppose, was in the daily

practice of the Christian mode of confession, and praying for himself that God would have mercy upon him. In like manner, all the most illustrious patriots and exemplary characters that are to be found in the page of history,—John Hampden, Milton, Sir Thomas More, William Penn, Howard, Allen of Prior Park, and Pope's "Man of Ross," we are bound to consider as having merited God's everlasting wrath, and only to be saved by free grace through the intercession of Jesus. Nothing can be more absurd than this, unless it be what also occurs in our Liturgy, that of every vagabond, whose remains we inter in consecrated ground, we aver that we commit him to the earth "in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection."

An erect and independent spirit is of the essence of true virtue. We are bound to consider man as but a "little lower than angels, and crowned" by the system of the universe "with glory and honour." One of the first principles of an enlightened morality is self-reverence. We must recollect the great things of which our nature is capable, and endeavour to act up to our high vocation. Those men whose lives have reflected the greatest honour on their species, have been marked by a generous and well-considered confidence in themselves, and, so stimulated, have "gone on in the way" of rectitude with self-complacency and joy.

ESSAY X.

ON LIBERTY.



ESSAY X.

On Liberty. (Fragment.)

“**E**VERY idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” This is the most intolerable sentence in the whole cycle of religious morality.

In the heart of every man is indelibly imprinted the love of liberty. The more generous his temper, and the more noble his nature, the more securely does this love exist within it; and till the last breath of his life expires he will hug it to his bosom, and not part with it, as long as he has any force in a tendon or a muscle by means of which it may be grasped.

We know in a manner intuitively the condition of our human life. We are members of a community. We are indissolubly connected with the society of our fellow-men. We have duties. We can perform actions that are worthy of applause; and we can commit crimes and offences against others. We easily reconcile ourselves

to this inevitable condition of our existence, and believe that, if we neglect our duties, we must expect in some way or other to be made accountable for it.

But we look for limits to our task. We are contented to be restrained; but we are not contented for our whole lives to dance in fetters. We expect that there is a time when we may lay down our load, stretch out limbs in the shade, and say, "Now I am all my own."

For the greater and more serious actions of our lives we are accountable. We are contented to be amenable to the laws of society for our delinquencies, and to God, if there be a God that knows and concerns himself with our proceedings, for having neglected to make the best use of our faculties, and on the supposition that we have "hid our talent in a napkin."

But we claim as our own peculiar province our innocence—innocence, in the strict and etymological sense of the word, that by which by no construction we can do any harm, when already every duty has been discharged, every debt paid to the uttermost penny. It is not much that we claim; but that little is not on that account the less precious to us.

We love, as Jesus says, to "enter into our closet, and shut the door, and" be "in secret." (Matt. vi. 6.) In other words, we love to shake off all restraint, save that of our innocence, and so to let our thoughts be free to roam wherever they please, and to say, "Now, within rational limits, I am accountable to no one; I may

indulge my genius, I may enact my pleasure without fear that I shall ever be arraigned for what I do, or that any one shall say, Wherefore dost thou thus or thus? Let there be a general resurrection, let there be a day of judgment ; I am at least secure of my secret hoard. It consists only of pebbles, and broken bits of some earthen utensil ; but their very worthlessness protects them, and renders them sacred and secure."

I know not that much is to be made of this, except as it tends to shew in one instance the extraordinary ignorance of Jesus as to the nature of man, and affords me an opportunity of unfolding a peculiarity of the human mind which is surely not unworthy of our attention.

Man is especially characterised by two propensities—the love of society, and the love of solitude. The former is perhaps the most essential to us, since the great bulk of ordinary men live almost perpetually in society ; and I do not know that they are apt to be unhappy for want of ever being alone. Society is our proper sphere. All our great lessons from youth to age are learned in society ; in society all our sweetest affections are called into play, and our main virtues are exercised. But the man of refinement, at least, can scarcely live without occasional intervals of solitude. "Commune with your own heart upon your bed," says the Psalmist, "and be still." (Psalm iv. 4.) Lord Shaftesbury has laid it down as a maxim, that soliloquy is a habit indispensable to an

author. We love to be alone ; to be surrounded with no objects but the fields and the trees, the mountains and the waters, to hear nothing but the rustling of the foliage and the songs of the birds, and to feel the fresh breeze of heaven playing upon our cheeks. And, when we are thus alone, how do we revel in the unbounded freedom of thought, conscious that we are under no restraint either of man, or (with reverence be it spoken) of God Himself ; that, within the limits of honour and innocence, we shall be called to no account, neither by any human tribunal, nor by a tribunal, which many of us look for, beyond the grave.

It would be too poor a slavery that we should not be permitted to draw a breath, or to lift a finger, but at the nod of our task-master. We surely may be allowed to throw a few summersets. Even boys, when they are out of school, are permitted to frisk, and to try the strength of their voices. The claims of the boy in his playground are in equity altogether as complete as those of the master in the school-room.

Taken in this point of view, it has something the air of bitter irony, when the apostle exhorts his fellow-Christians to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free." (Gal. v. 1.)

ESSAY XI.

*ON THE MIXED CHARACTER OF CHRISTIANITY, ITS
HORRORS, AND ITS GRACES.*



ESSAY XI.

On the Mixed Character of Christianity, its Horrors, and its Graces.

JESUS was certainly a most extraordinary character, though that alone will by no means adequately account for the marvellous fortune of his religion.

The first feature of his character which we will on the present occasion take into consideration, is that gloomy trait in his disposition, which led him to inculcate, or even induced him to believe in, the doctrine of everlasting torments. There is something atrocious in this part of his story. It forcibly brings to the mind the character of St. Dominic, the original conductor of the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition. We cannot but believe that there was something ferocious and inhuman in the disposition of the man (St. Dominic) who could contemplate the inflicting indescribable tortures on the unhappy individuals that differed from him in a point of faith, and who perhaps watched with a serene sharpness of observation the moment of human infirmity, when the resoluteness of

the martyr should give way to the frailty of the flesh. It is true that in the case of Jesus the scene of torment was not actually exhibited before his senses, and that by the constitution of our nature the prediction or the menace of exquisite sufferings is borne with less mental disturbance, when their real presence would

——— “Unfix our hair,
And make our seated heart knock at our ribs,
Against the use of nature.”

But there must be something uncommonly stern in the temper of him who could make this article a characteristic feature in the creed he promulgated, and, as I have elsewhere said, have plainly manifested the complacency with which he dwelt on the idea, by repeating the denunciation in its most terrific form three times in the course of six verses. What a fearful depth of bigotry must have steeled the heart of the man, who without hesitation propagated this doctrine! It is strange that it did not once enter his mind, that by so ferocious an assurance he ran an imminent danger of oversetting the whole system which he was so much in earnest to build. And it shall yet upset the religion of Jesus, though for so many centuries it has failed to produce that effect.

And it appears how deeply the mind of Jesus was imbued with this sentiment, since, not contented with throwing out the denunciation in general terms, he even specifically applies it to the men among whom he moved and lived. In a particular instance we are told that

when his disciples, James and John, said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? . . . he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are: for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke ix. 54—56.) Yet, when he found the cities of Judea turning a deaf ear to his preachings, he did not scruple plentifully to pour out his curses upon them. "Wo unto thee, Chorazin! wo unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." (Matt. xi. 21—24.) Here he must have had actually before his eyes the figures and visages of the men against whom he was denouncing everlasting torments. And, by referring to the "day of judgment," it would appear that Jesus plainly had in his mind sufferings without end.

I will not on this occasion enlarge upon the minor faults of Christianity. I will consider it as no longer a living principle, but as that which, having passed away

is a subject only of historical recollection. Its indirect and incidental accompaniments I will consider, each in its turn, as entitled to notice, but not to be "remembered in its epitaph." I will not take into my account those evils which in a manner have illegitimately sprung out of it, but do not seem expressly to make a part of its substance. I spoke of its gloomy and impatient character, because it appertains justly to the qualities of its author.

The subject of this Essay is the Mixed Character of Christianity, its Horrors, and its Graces. I have spoken of the former ; I now come to speak of the latter.

That which is, perhaps, entitled to the first place among its Graces, is the ennobling, I had almost said the divine, nature of its leading principle, namely, love. "God," says the favourite disciple of Jesus, "God is love." (1 John iv. 8.) And he himself has laid it down as the corner-stone of his system, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Matt. xxii. 37, 39.)

It is no matter whether the idea of an intelligent Creator, whose essence is love, and who is therefore to be perfectly and entirely loved, is the dictate of the purest and the soundest philosophy. The merit of the principle will remain unaltered. Its characteristic is disinterestedness. It stands in direct opposition to the

grovelling principle, born in France, and which is the curse of modern times, that all human motives are ultimately resolvable into self-love. It makes virtue to be really virtue, and not a semblance only. It bases the actions of the good man upon a just and irrefragable estimate of the value of things; not upon a consideration in which the best action that ever was performed is made the action in the whole world of the most exquisite and deliberate injustice, and where the greatest good is most directly postponed to private and personal gratification.*

Nothing can be conceived of more exquisite sublimity than Jesus's answer to the young lawyer who, pursuing the enquiry, said to him, "And who is my neighbour?" It comes with an infinitely higher grace by being couched in an apologue: "A certain man (a Jew) fell among thieves;" and the individual that "took compassion on him" was a Samaritan. (Luke x.) Now, as another evangelist says, "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." (John iv. 9.)

Nothing can be more beautiful than the apologues, the parables, as they are called, in which Jesus conveys his instructions. They have a simplicity, an unaffectedness, which goes directly to the heart.

How full are all his discourses of aphorisms, conveying the deepest thoughts in the most unpretending style!

* "Thoughts on Man," p. 210.

What was once said of Shakespear, though not perhaps with perfect correctness, may well be affirmed of Jesus. There is not a question of duty in human life that will not be found resolved in one or other of the discourses of this wonderful man. He seems to have considered everything, and is never for a moment at a loss in any question that is propounded to him.

And where did he get this morality, which is, on the whole, of such unparalleled purity, or, if it is ever liable to censure, is yet stamped with a true nobility of character, worthy of our highest admiration?

Socrates has repeatedly been compared to Jesus, as teacher of the highest morality. But Socrates had the advantage of being born in the most enlightened age of Greece, where there had already gone before him characters of illustrious virtue, and where the inhabitants had caught the sparks of a true independence of soul from the most glorious example of the victory of a well-tempered spirit over the mere power of numbers that the world ever saw, in the defeat and disgrace of the innumerable armies of Xerxes in the Persian invasion.

But Jesus was born among a people who had already sustained every species of degradation. If the Jews had once produced sublime poets and accomplished moralists, they had since experienced a seventy years' exile and captivity under the Kings of Babylon. Restored, however imperfectly, from this, they sank in succession into a province, first under Alexander's successors, and

then under the Romans, with the additional aggravation that they were treated with the most galling contempt and hate by all in their turn. The Jews accordingly became base, servile, and double-tongued in their habits. Their more eminent personages were divided into sects, one of them the most formal, and at the same time the most arrogant upon record, who made broad their phylacteries, gave their alms that they might be seen of men, and used long prayers in the corners of the streets. The other sect believed in no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit, and seemed to have derided everything that their opponents regarded as most sacred. And yet Jesus, in the midst of all this depravity, purely by the enlargement of his views, and the erectness of his soul, attained to the pitch of a moral system, which up to that time the world had never seen.

Socrates led the men to whom he addressed himself to the conclusions he sought by a series of ensnaring questions, by which they were at unawares driven to yield to the sentiments he required. He made long orations, in which he divided his subjects with a certain degree of pedantry and parade, and pressed his conclusions with scientific and artfully-contrived arrangement. By these habits he became in some degree allied to the sophists of his country. But the tone of Jesus's discourses was of too lofty a character to submit to the shackles of ingenuity. He uttered his lessons with a depth of sincerity and a truth of nature, that

surprised his auditors, and compelled them to exclaim, "Truly this is the Son of God." It is no doubt in part owing to this, that his religion has had so triumphant a career, and that those who have once been thoroughly imbued with its principles, have found it so difficult to disengage themselves from its imposing character, and escape into the liberty in which a truly independent understanding most delights to expatiate.

ESSAY XII.

*ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD AS DESCRIBED IN THE
SCRIPTURES.*



ESSAY XII.

On the Character of God as described in the Scriptures.

IT is difficult to conceive any proposition more irresistible than that, if the world has an intelligent Creator, He must be all goodness. He can have no motive or impulse to inflict evil on anything that lives. He must be without passions, for ever serene and benevolent. We, the creatures of His power, are infinitely too much beneath His greatness for it to be possible for us to excite His anger. We “dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, and they are crushed before the moth.” (Job iv. 19.) He can dispose of us as He pleases, and has power over us, as the “potter over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel, one to honour, and another unto dishonour.” (Rom. ix. 21.) By His sovereign power, He can mould us as He pleases, and in a moment change the most depraved and refractory character into the most innocent and virtuous. Yet in how diametrical opposition to

this is the character of God, as exhibited in the Scriptures.

Of Jesus it has been said, that all his miracles were benevolent. "The blind received their sight, and the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, and the dead was raised up." (Matt. ix. 5.) But it is not so with all the miracles recorded in the New Testament. Elymas, the sorcerer, being cursed by the Apostle Paul, was immediately struck with blindness. And Ananias and Sapphira, two of the early converts to Christianity, having sold a possession, for the alleged purpose of throwing the produce into a common stock, and keeping back part of the price, and being taxed with this, having denied it, fell down instantly in the presence of the apostles, and expired. (Acts xiii. and Acts v.)

But the thing most especially deserving of notice is the character of the Almighty creator of the universe, as recorded in the Scriptures. And we cannot sufficiently wonder, that with this character given to the all-perfect being, the Scriptures should, nevertheless, for so many revolving centuries, have constituted the creed of so large a portion of the most enlightened nations of the world.

God, having determined to give to the chosen descendants of Abraham and the patriarchs the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, for their possession, proceeds in His own good time, through a

series of stupendous miracles, to carry His everlasting decree into effect. He sends Moses to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to whom the Israelites were then, in a state of bondage, to command that monarch in the name of Jehovah to "let them go for three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord." At the same time, God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exod. vii., ff.), that he should not let them go. At length, through a series of terrors and calamities, he is induced to drive them out. He had, however, no sooner given them leave to depart, than, through a judgment of God upon him, he repented, and made ready his host to intercept their flight. God, in the meanwhile, divided the Red Sea, that the Israelites might pass through dryshod; and no sooner was that effected, than the waves returned in their strength, and drowned the "chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh in the sea," so that not one of them escaped.

By a perpetual miracle, the Jews wandered "forty years in the wilderness," which they might have crossed in less than as many days; "their clothes did not wax old upon their bodies, nor their shoes upon their feet," during this period.

At length God brought them into the land of the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, having determined to cut off these nations, that there might be no mixture of idolatry among His chosen people, but that they might possess the territory entire to themselves. He therefore

commanded them to "burn all the cities" wherein they dwelt, and their goodly castles with fire. And they "slew all the males." But God did not find this enough ; and further directed that they should kill the male infants, and "every woman that had known man, and keep the rest alive for themselves." (Numbers xxxi. 17, 18.)

Previous to this, and while the Israelites were yet in the wilderness, a rebellion broke out against Moses among the tribe of Levi, at the head of which were Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Moses said to the congregation, "Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, . . . lest ye be consumed in all their sins." And these men "came out and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. And Moses said, . . . If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit, then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them ; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed

upon them." Nor was God satisfied with this vengeance. He also sent a plague among the congregation; and there "died of the plague fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died in the matter of Korah." (Numbers xvi.)

God found the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah full of unnatural lusts, and He rained upon them brimstone and fire out of heaven, and overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of those cities, and that which grew upon the ground, and set them "forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7.)

A memorable instance of the Divine severity is recorded in the second Book of Chronicles. It is a maxim not seldom repeated in the Old Testament, that we ought to rely on the omnipotence of God, and not offend Him by having recourse to human aid for our own deliverance. Accordingly, we read of Asa, king of Israel, though otherwise a pious sovereign, that he offended God, because "in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians" (2 Chron. xvi. 12); and he died accordingly. In the same spirit it is written, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." (Psalm xx. 7.)

Now, at a certain time, David, forgetful of his own maxims, issued a commission to the captains of his host to take a census of his subjects. With this act

God was grievously offended, as tending to shew the king's distrust of the power of the Almighty, and gave David, by his prophet, the alternative of three things from which to choose as His punishment: seven years of famine, three months of defeat by his enemies, or three days of pestilence. David, it seems, preferred "falling into the hand of the Lord," and chose the last; and, in consequence of his election, seventy thousand of his subjects died of the plague. (2 Sam. xxiv.)

A striking example of the punishment of a lie is recorded of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the prophet. This man, seeing that his master would accept no recompense from Naaman, the Syrian, for a memorable cure that had been performed on him, pursued Naaman, and trumped up a story of an unexpected call that had been made on his master's liberality, in consequence of the arrival of "two young men of the sons of the prophets." Elisha, through the gift he possessed of seeing what was done when he himself was not present, taxed Gehazi with the fraud, who stoutly denied it. The prophet immediately pronounced upon him the awful denunciation, "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow." (2 Kings v. 27.)

But perhaps the most revolting instance of the Divine vengeance is recorded of the same Elisha, when he returned from seeing Elijah taken up into heaven in

a chariot of fire. "And he went up thence into Bethel; and, as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald-head: go up, thou bald-head. And he turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty-two children of them." (2 Kings ii. 23, 24.)

A story, not altogether so tragical, but no less repugnant to our ideas of the Divine character, is related of Ahab, king of Israel. A prophet was brought before him, of whom to enquire, "Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" a question on which he had consulted four hundred false prophets before. And the prophet said, "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? . . . And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also. Go forth, and do so." (1 Kings xxii. 19—22.)

But the most extraordinary illustration of the character of the God of the Scriptures is to be found in the history of the universal deluge. God employed six days

in the creation of heaven and earth ; and, at the close of this mighty operation, " God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good." (Gen. i. 3.) But the earth was no sooner fully peopled, than " God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth ; both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air ; for it repenteth me that I have made them." (Gen. vi. 5, 6.) God accordingly " broke up the fountains of the great deep, and opened the windows of heaven ;" " and all flesh died that moved upon the earth ; both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man ; . . . and every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground." (Gen. vii. 21, 22.) God only reserved eight human creatures, and of beasts and birds two and two, the male and the female, " to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth."

What a picture does this present to us of an omniscient God ; who sees events in their remotest consequences, and who, therefore, cannot produce anything the results of which He does not exactly design, who " calleth those things which be not as though they were " (Rom. iv. 17),

and "with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning!" (James i. 17.)

But the character of the God of the Scriptures is the same throughout. His purpose in selecting His chosen people apparently was, that He might preserve one race of men exempt from the errors of idolatry and polytheism. But in this object He eminently failed. The Jews, up to the period of the Babylonish captivity, scarcely missed any opportunity of falling into the grossness of idolatry.

The first instance which occurs in the Scripture history of this nation is, when Moses was forty days absent with God upon Mount Sinai, that the people said to Aaron, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for, as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." And Aaron made them a golden calf, and they worshipped it. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Now let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people? . . . Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against this people. . . . And the Lord repented of the evil which He had thought to do unto His people." (Exodus xxxii. 1, 10.)

After the lapse of one or two generations, the Jews, however, "forsook the Lord, and served Baalim and the

groves. Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the king of Mesopotamia." (Judges iii. 7, 8.)

The Jews having for a series of years been governed by judges, they at length desired to have a king to go before them like the other nations. And Saul was made their king accordingly. And God commissioned Saul to destroy the Amalekites. And the Lord said, "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not ; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling." . . . But Saul saved Agag, the king of the Amalekites ; in other respects he obeyed the command he had received. "Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king." . . . And Samuel said, "Bring ye hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately ; and Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. . . . And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. And the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel." (1 Sam. xv.)

The "anger of the Lord" is often spoken of in the Scriptures. And the Psalmist says, "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thy anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever ; wilt thou draw out thy anger to all generations ? . . . Shew us thy mercy, O Lord ; and grant us thy salvation." (Psalm lxxxv. 4—7.)

Nor is this character peculiar to the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul speaks of "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God." (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.) And elsewhere also he exhorts us, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord." (Rom. xii. 19.) By this expression clearly implying, that it is an attribute of which God is jealous, and will not allow it to be usurped by a meaner nature. It is the peculiar province of the Creator; that in which his soul delighteth.

I have heard of an instance in which Coleridge, my contemporary, a great mystic, but a man of most extraordinary talents, was expatiating in company, in extremely glowing and captivating colours, upon the qualities of the devil. At length a lady, who had been listening very attentively to his discourse, in the simplicity of her heart exclaimed, "Mr. Coleridge, according to your account, one would almost mistake the devil for God." To which the philosopher rejoined in a tone of peculiar significance, "Madam, the devil is God."—Now, certainly, if we are to take the expressions above cited for a literal description of the character of the Creator of the universe, we might with sufficient propriety adopt the inference, God is the devil.

But in reality we must not interpret these things with too strict and universal an application. Systems which

represent the cause of all things as an intellectual being, are only so many shades of anthropomorphism. We take the converse of Moses's position, "Let us make man in our own image," and make God in the image of man. Now, as the first ideas of a theistical system were necessarily framed in ages comparatively barbarous, it inevitably follows that the notions delivered of the Creator of the universe should smack of the character of the period in which the notions were framed. And it unfortunately happens, where these theories are committed to writing, and handed down from age to age as the offspring of divine inspiration, that they will still be marked with the character of dispositions that have long since ceased to exist, and will not take the mould which is greatly to be desired, of a period of greater refinement and civilization.

It is true that the conquest of Canaan, as described by the Jewish historians, was conducted in a very merciless manner. But it would be unfair to judge of the proceedings of these remote times by a reference to the comparatively mitigated and humane maxims of our own. After every deduction they will appear sufficiently revolting and terrible. But they were by no means so fraught with detestation and horror then as they are found by us now.

To exemplify the truth of this statement, let us refer by way of illustration to the well-known exploits of Alexander the Great, who has often been held up as the model of a liberal and generous conqueror.

While Alexander, in the commencement of his reign, was meditating the conquest of Persia, many cities of Greece, which had been previously subjugated by his father Philip, revolted against him. The principal, and the most hostile of these, was Thebes. Alexander at first only demanded of the citizens, as a token of their submission, that they should deliver up to him Phoenix and Prothutes, the ringleaders of their revolt. But the Thebans, confident in their strength, contemptuously answered the demand, by requiring that Alexander should deliver to them Philotas and Antipater, two of his chief generals. Alexander, irritated by this insult, when he took their city, though they made no further resistance, gave orders that all who were found in the place should be slaughtered. Neither private houses nor temples were regarded, neither sex nor age were spared in the general destruction. When at length the rage of massacre was satiated, thirty thousand citizens, men and women, who were found to have survived the general destruction, were sold for slaves. All the houses in the town were razed to the ground; that of Pindar only was left standing, to manifest the reverence of the conqueror for so sublime a genius.

Tyre, in the further progress of Alexander's victories, was taken by storm. The citizens, for the purpose of repelling the invader, cast down stones, and whatever other missile came to their hand, upon the advancing enemy. On the other part, the conqueror gave orders

to kill the inhabitants, and to set fire to the town in every part. Thirty thousand strangers, as well as citizens, were sold into slavery, for the profit of the conquering army.

Alexander, still unsatisfied with the progress of his victorious arms. marched into India. The people of this country, famous from the remotest times for their mild demeanour and inoffensive manners, religiously abstained from animal food. But this consideration was of no avail with the conqueror. In a conflict before their first fortified town, Alexander chanced to receive a wound. The town was taken ; and the Macedonians, exasperated with the injury that was sustained by their chief, gave no quarter. Alexander himself sanctioned this severity by ordering the town to be razed to its foundations.

We see enough in these transactions, though occurring in an age and a country much more civilised than that of Moses, to shew us that the style in which the conquest of Canaan was prosecuted, appeared much less atrocious to its contemporaries than it does to us now. The Creator of the universe is said to have sanctioned these severities. But there is little wonder in this. Man, as we have already said, fashions his God principally upon the model of his own manners and ideas. Hence it follows that, where men were brutal and sanguinary in their proceedings, they represented God as acting in a similar manner, and saw nothing reprehensible in it.

How much superior to these crude and barbarous

notions is the creed of the Orientals, who represented the system of the universe as under the conduct of two opposite and contending principles, the one the author of all good, the other of all evil! By means of this hypothesis they kept their superior God, the good principle free from all contamination of the evil passions, and the series of calamities with which the system of sublunary things is deformed. Oromasdes they represented as utterly removed from anger and vengeance, for ever happy and serene, always designing good for his creatures, though unfortunately, in a multitude of instances, controlled and frustrated by the malevolence of the evil principle, who was in all cases disposed to contrive mischief against us.

Anaxagoras and Socrates were the first among the Greeks who taught that an intelligent mind was the great cause of the system of the universe such as we behold it. They were, however, too much occupied with the ideas of infinite power, and a wise and discerning arrangement of all things, to have afforded sufficient scope for a pure and active benevolence, and all those finer and more subtle qualities of mind which modern times have accustomed us to include in the idea of a God.

In strictness, the schoolmen of the middle ages were the first who conceived the idea of pure theism, such as we now understand it. Impregnated as they were with all the subtleties of metaphysics, they applied them first and chiefly to the subject of the divinity. They taught

that God was all in all, and all in every part. They represented Him as existing in all time, and pervading every part of space. They held that, though He existed for ever, yet that His existence was without succession. They believed that He filled all space, yet was without division, and that a multitude of worlds existed in space without in the slightest degree interfering with His omnipresence.

Having digested all these subtleties, it cost them nothing to ascribe to Him moral attributes of a similar character. In reality, it followed from these premisses, that His dispositions must at all times and on all occasions be the same. For ever abounding in benevolence, without the smallest alloy of anger and ill-will. For ever serene, without the slightest cloud of perturbation or passion. For ever active, and seeking at all times and in every direction for opportunities of doing good, and multiplying happiness through every possible species of being, and through all the varieties in which happiness is capable of being diffused.

ESSAY XIII.

ON THE IDEA OF AN INTELLIGENT CREATOR.

ESSAY XIII.

On the Idea of an Intelligent Creator.

IT may not be without its use to interpose one Essay on the hypothesis of an intelligent being, infinitely powerful and wise, who made the visible universe such as we behold it. Infinite benevolence is of course, and always has been, included in this supposition.

To lay down the results of this hypothesis, it is necessary that we should put aside in our disquisition the contrary appearances of misery and calamity actually existing, and which must for ever puzzle and confound the understandings of men who embrace this theory. We will merely follow out the natural and unforced consequences which unavoidably result from the original proposition.

In this case, then, the species of mankind would be placed in a truly enviable condition. God, the intelligent Being who framed the world, could have no impulse to direct His proceedings but the purest benevolence. He could have no motive to injure us

and give us pain. He could have no vengeance, no resentment, no anger. He would look upon us as too impotent and insignificant to offend Him. In the unboundedness of His benignity, He would not despise any of the creatures He had made. He that formed us from the womb, that moulded this fine and complicated machine, that wrote our members in His book, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them, and that finally bestowed on us all the countless treasures of human understanding, will He mar the work of His hands? Will He send agony along the fibres which, with such matchless skill, and humanly speaking, with such patient and unremitting attention, He has formed? Let us consider the infinite fineness of the feelings that are imparted to us, where one circumstance that crosses and annoys us, is able to change our paradise into purgatory, and then think of hell and for ever! "He that formed the eye," shall He not apprehend the extremity of torture of which that little organ is susceptible? He that unfolded all the vast complexities of our mortal machine, shall He employ their boundless capabilities for the purpose of inflicting upon us inexpressible agonies? Shall He first have made us what we are, and then take advantage of our structure to render us miserable? And all this, according to the New Testament, to be a fate reserved for the great mass of mankind, for the frivolous, for all varieties and shades of character, for many highly gifted, highly

disinterested, endowed with a thousand sublime virtues. And why? Because they have not faith, an involuntary act, an act of the understanding only. For the absence of a seal, a mark in the forehead, an arbitrary selection. For "whom He will" He chooses, and "whom He will" He rejects. (Rom. ix. 18.) Is it possible to imagine greater blasphemy than this? And said not Plutarch well when he observed that the atheist was to be preferred to the superstitious man? "For I had rather it should be said of me," he adds, "that there never was such a man as Plutarch, than that it should be said that Plutarch was ill-natured, arbitrary, capricious, cruel, and inexorable."

Beside the infinite horror which the impartial man would conceive for the God of the New Testament, let us also ponder a little on the nature of punishment. Forcible chastisement, in the intercourse of man and society, unquestionably amounts to a confession of impotence in the chastiser. If He knew what was right, could He not communicate that knowledge to the delinquent? Could He not enlighten his understanding, and thus correct his errors? He has probably tried the experiment (take the case between master and servant, superior and inferior, tutor and pupil,) and has failed. And, to supply His deficiency in logic and demonstration, He has resort to brute force. Brute force is in no way adapted to enlighten the understanding; the best thing it can effect is to produce servility, a fawning and

cowardly prostration of soul before Him that is mightier than we are. "An appeal to force must appear to both parties, in proportion to the soundness of their understanding, to be a confession of imbecility. He that has recourse to it would have no occasion for this expedient, if he were sufficiently acquainted with the powers of that truth it is his office to communicate."*

And shall a schoolmaster and a magistrate stand in need of this apology for their summary proceeding; and shall we suppose Almighty God to require a similar excuse for infirmity?

It is commonly said that Divine Providence proceeds with us for the most part according to the laws of nature, and that God himself is voluntarily restricted by the principles of the system He has established. He acts only by general laws, and never oversteps the settled order of the universe. He works no miracles, but leaves His rational creatures to the protection of their own foresight and their own discretion.

But this consideration, whatever force there may be in it in ordinary cases, does not apply to the question before us. God, we are told, "hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness." (Acts xvii. 31.) Upon this awful occasion all the ordinary laws of the universe are suspended. It is a period in which the Author of all things will appear, to set right

* "Political Justice," book ii., chap. vi.

by His immediate interference all that has hitherto been defective, when "the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." He is no longer shackled by the system He had instituted, and which appeared necessary on ordinary occasions to give scope for the foresight of man and whatever intelligent natures may be concerned in these questions. Can we suppose that it will then be necessary to employ the express interposition of force and power to correct what is wrong, or to take vengeance on the perverseness of the creatures He has made? What can be more frightful and more discordant with the most obvious reason of things, than that the supreme Ruler of the universe should then have recourse to despotic punishments, and condemn those who have displeased Him to the retribution of everlasting torments?

No. He whose omnipotence no power can control will be aware that He has only to present before the erroneous the evidence of everlasting reason. All ambiguities, all the tangled skein of sophistries will immediately disappear. Truth will shew itself, and be welcomed with sincere delight by those who before most resolutely closed their eyes against it. In the language of the prophet, the supreme Being, agreeably to the benevolence of His nature, will be employed in "putting a new spirit into" those who before most strayed from His laws, in "taking away the stony heart from them, and giving them a heart of flesh." (Ezek. xi. 19.)



ESSAY XIV.

ON NATURE.

ESSAY XIV.

On Nature.

NATURE is a term that has been so licentiously used, and with such a perplexity of senses, that on the present occasion I will endeavour so to define and limit my meaning, as shall best tend to make the idea I would convey fully understood.

There is much system and order in what we see, whether of the visible and, as it is usually styled, the material universe, or the universe of mind. This order it is customary, at least in modern times, to attribute to a Creator, an intelligent, invisible being, possessed of such extraordinary attributes, that he has caused the unbounded multitude of the substances we behold to rise out of nothing, and since conducts the vast machine without perplexity, being everywhere at once, and guiding the endless operations that are perpetually going on above, below, and around us,

“As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart.”

I can only say that in all this there is so little analogy

to mind, such as I have occasion clearly to remark, that I am not satisfied to reason from one to the other. I cannot understand the producing of something out of nothing. It is most essentially characteristic of mind, such as I behold it, to attend to only one thing at a time. I have no conception of a mind that at the same moment acts everywhere, and performs operations multiplied and diversified beyond the limits of any human arithmetic to enumerate.

I therefore do not consider my faculties adequate to the pronouncing upon the cause of all things. I am contented to take the phenomena as I behold them, without pretending to erect an hypothesis under the idea of making all things easy. I do not rest my globe of earth upon an elephant, and the elephant upon a tortoise. I am contented to take my globe of earth simply, in other words, to observe the objects which present themselves to my senses, without undertaking to find out a cause why they are as they are.

This, however, does not prevent me from acknowledging something inexpressibly admirable in the system of the universe, or from regarding with the lowliest reverence and awe that principle, whatever it is, which acts everywhere around me, and which in a multitude of cases produces such adorable effects. It is the fashion of modern times to call this wisdom. Wisdom I believe may be described to be the result of ideas, reflection, the comparison of different impressions and conceptions,

the designed adaptation of means to ends, and the selection among various methods which offer themselves to our acceptance that which seems to be the best. To apply the term wisdom therefore to the formation of the earth and the things that are therein, I should regard as a species of anthropomorphism, the shaping the incomprehensible cause of all things after the model of the human mind. I do not pretend to understand so much of the universe and its contents as this hypothesis implies. I should cite this mode of proceeding as an example, to speak in unceremonious language, of the way in which sometimes, in the sublimest enquiries,

“Fools rush in, where angels fear to tread.”

But, without presuming to explain the ineffable cause of all things, I do not the less acknowledge the worth and excellence of that principle, whatever it is, which, while its operations are infinitely beyond my comprehension, is almost everywhere producing such admirable effects.

Without wandering among the starry heavens, where, it may be, “other planets circle other suns,” I see enough in the various objects that surround me in this globe of which I am an inhabitant, to fill me with rapture in contemplating the beneficent effects that are operating on every side. I find a plentiful harmony and adaptation of one thing to another throughout. Vegetables are fitted for the sustentation and nourishment of animals.

Air is adapted to respiration and the maintenance of life. The earth is clothed with shrubs and trees, with foliage, flowers, and fruits. Life is a mystery which we can neither define nor explain, but which we unequivocally recognise. The vegetable springs up from a seed, petty and insignificant in its appearance, but which in due time "grows up and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches." It has a root, and a trunk, and boughs, which send out foliage. It has life and health. It has sap, which circulates through its members. If you wound it, it bleeds. Man may at pleasure cut it down, and so put an end to the living principle which till then animated it. It has youth and age—youth characterised with vigour, in which it daily enlarges and expands itself, and age, when its vigour diminishes, and it comes by degrees to decay and die.

There is further something wonderful, and to the organisation of the human mind delicious, in the life, so to speak, of inanimate nature, in the perpetual flowing of a river, in the alternate advance and retreat of the tide, in the action of light and heat, and in the motion of the winds and the clouds. These do not stand in need of a spectator. They go on for ever in their salutary and vivifying operations. In solitudes into which man nor beast ever penetrated, they still display their exuberant wealth, without needing the tribute of admiration, or expecting thankfulness in any of its forms.

The efficacy of the seasons is not less deserving of our

attention. Spring never fails with every revolving year to produce foliage and flowers. The plant no sooner finds itself subject to the genial beams of the sun, than it owns the power, and becomes informed with new life. Thus is there a youth in vegetable nature which is perpetually renewing, or, if from the silent influence of years it disappears in individuals, is reproduced in another quarter.

The animal creation is more admirable than the vegetable. The symmetry of limbs in animals is adapted to all the purposes which their mode of subsistence requires. The joints and articulations of their bodies are well suited to their various pursuits. Their parts are exceedingly complicated, yet all harmonious. They have all blood which circulates through their frame, and maintains them in life and health. Their mouths are adapted to seize on their food, and their teeth to masticate it. Then presents itself to our observation the wonderful process of digestion. More than all these we may be reasonably astonished with the five senses, which for the greater part are the inheritance of each, and the organs of which are so curiously adapted to effect their purposes, the sight, the hearing, the feeling, which is dispersed through every part, the smell, and the taste. There is a principle within each animal, the site of which seems to be in the brain, that collects the reports of the senses, and makes use of them in a way best adapted to the well-being of the animal to which they belong. This

principle, which I should call the mind or understanding of the animal, selects or rejects among the different objects which offer themselves to his choice, the thing most suited to his purposes. Thus the dog by his sense of smelling discovers the track of his master, and of those animals which constitute his prey. Every animal has within him a faculty of comparison, and the principle which we denominate election, or will. Almost all animals can be trained to a certain process of action, in which by assignable degrees they advance, and proceed onward to a higher or lower point of facility or improvement.

Lastly, we come to man, the masterpiece of the earth in which we dwell. His form is in many respects similar to that of the nobler animals, but with immense advantages over them all. His erect figure speaks him at once the lord of the earth. His hands are most admirably calculated as instruments to produce the stupendous effects which form the history of man. His very nakedness essentially contributes to the rendering him the being that we find him. He requires clothing and shelter; and these wants imperiously stimulate his ingenuity to supply them. The countenance of man is a magazine for the expression of thoughts; and through it we awaken in each other sympathy and deference. But more than all the other characteristics which distinguish him is the faculty of speech, by which we impart to each other the knowledge of a thousand phenomena,

together with infinite shades of sentiment and observation, and all the various subtleties of thought. It is this which brings us into society and communities, and gives occasion to the co-operation we exhibit, whether of body or mind. By this we build houses and cities. By this we are induced to cultivate the arts of design and painting, of sculpture and architecture. Lastly, by this we are prompted to engage ourselves in the pursuit of science and literature, enabling one man to improve on the advances of another, to erect libraries, and to arrive at the mighty refinements which human nature has exhibited in the various ages of the world. Nor is it among the least of the advantages we possess, that human beings are from infancy to maturity so long in a state of dependence, and by such slow degrees arrive at the entire possession of their bodily faculties, thus giving a field upon which to unfold all the resources of education.

Thus, without pretending to explain the way in which the great principle of all things perpetually operates, we do not the less acknowledge its bountiful and beneficent effects. The principle is not intellectual; its "ways are not our ways;" but for that it only the more steadily seems to hold steadily on its course, and to be the better adapted to be calculated upon for its consequent results.

This, then, is the state of things as they are first presented to our senses. Such we should find them, if,

with our present powers of observation, we were introduced at once to this terrestrial scene, such as it is in its full arrangement, and the complete organisation of the machine. Such they were to our progenitors, whose reports by tradition or otherwise have been handed down to us.

Having first observed this vast machine of the earth and its inhabitants as at a given moment they stand before us, we next come to behold the revolutions that occur in the machine, and the various changes that take place around us. This I should call *nature*. How the universe came to be as it is, it is in vain for man to endeavour to discover ; but we can follow its operations, and to a certain extent minute down its processes as we see them succeed to each other. It is in this way that we ascertain the Laws of Nature, and perceive that regular succession of antecedents and consequents that enables us in many cases to predict what is about to happen, and to model our judgments and our actions accordingly.

Now, as in the universe, such as we suppose it first presented to our observation, we find a wonderful adaptation of means to ends similar to what, from the imperfect analogies we are acquainted with, we should be apt to denominate wisdom ; so, in the processes and changes which take place before our eyes, we in like manner remark a beneficent tendency, by means of which things are continued, are maintained in their state

and condition, and even, as it often happens, restored and set right again after the unfortunate casualties that may occur.

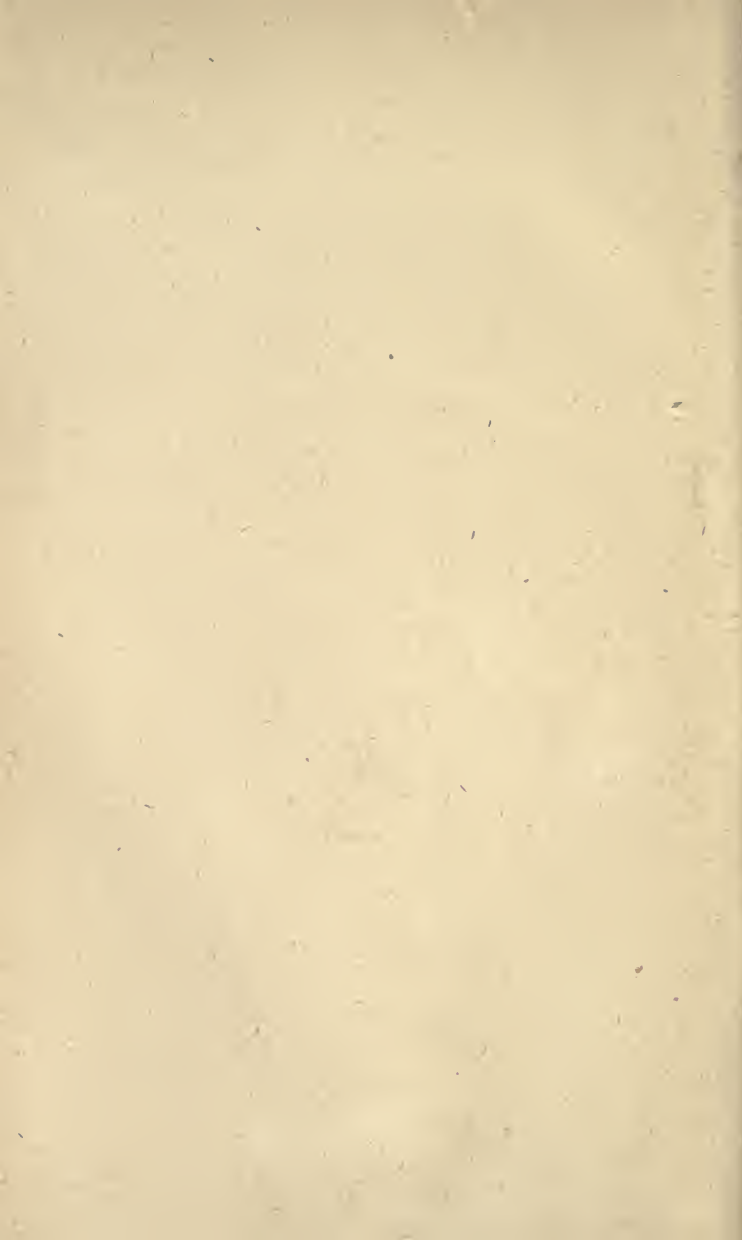
As the system of the universe presents us with a wonderful spectacle of harmony, where a thousand complicated movements all lead to one beneficial result, so in the progress and succession of events we perpetually observe the same salutary and beneficent tendency. The circulation of the blood, by means of which this life-giving fluid is distributed from the heart to all the members and articulations of the body, is a memorable example of this. Thus every part of our frame for a long series of years is kept in perpetual youth and vigour. The form of man, from its first invisible existence in the pancreatic juice to the appearance of the head of the foetus, and thence to the gradual shooting forth and unfolding of the members, to the infant, the boy, and the man, full formed and mature,—all seems under the guidance of a power for ever vigilant and for ever active. The various juices and secretions of the body tend in their operation to the maintaining the life and vigour of the whole. When any part is out of order there is an invariable tendency, through the healing hand of time, to the restoration of its pristine and healthful state. The bone that is broken knits together again and becomes useful. The flesh that is wounded, on the majority of occasions, heals, cicatrises, and grows sound as before. This is particularly remarkable in what is called “healing

in the first intention." Bind up a wound in its blood, and this admirable fluid is observed to find its way, and in a short time to circulate as if nothing adverse had occurred. It seems as if there were a balsam in the animal body, which, beyond all the succours of artificial skill, exhibits itself as sanative and restoring.

All this is instead of what is commonly understood by Providence. If we have not an omniscient friend, who perpetually beholds the things he has made, who "careth for us, and whose tender mercies are over all his works," there is nevertheless a principle in nature which in a vast sum of instances works for good and operates beneficially for us. It is active in our behalf while we sleep. We repose upon it with confidence, and are satisfied. In these instances it is to us like a Providence. As Addison says, in the parallel of honour and virtue, it "imitates her actions where she is not." We have here a secure alliance, a friend that, so far as the system of things extends, will never desert us, unhearing, inaccessible to importunity, uncapricious, without passions, without favour, affection, or partiality, that "maketh its sun to rise on the evil and the good, and its rain to descend on the just and the unjust," that nourishes from its unexhausted bosom everything that lives—"beasts, and all cattle, and creeping things."

ESSAY XV.

ON MIRACLES.



ESSAY XV.

On Miracles.

THE question of miracles has perhaps never been placed exactly on its right footing ; and therefore a few pages may not inappropriately be spent on the subject in this volume.

Hume and others have employed a very subtle reasoning to demonstrate their general incredibility. It is not impossible that a plainer species of reasoning may carry more conviction to the majority of mankind.

The first thing that occurs to an impartial and unprejudiced mind, is that miracles, like witchcraft and the belief in ghosts, have their day, and belong to certain periods in the progress of human illumination. While ignorance prevails and the laws of nature have been very imperfectly explained, these things gain admission into the creed of mankind with little or no resistance. We are then prone to the wonderful ; and that which we delight in easily obtains our assent. The rules of evidence have not yet been laid down, nor the criticism of history unfolded.

By degrees the enlightened portion of our species becomes more scrupulous and sceptical. We look with a more scrutinising eye into what is presented to our senses ; and there are persons who will devote their faculties to the detecting imposition, and overwhelming the impostor with confusion and disgrace.

Till that time comes it is surprising how men yield in crowds to the first impulse of credulity. The disease is found to be contagious ; and we follow, like a flock of sheep, through the first breach that is made in the protecting hedge of truth. The human mind, in its original, unprimed state, does not brook the being curbed with laws, inflexible and severe, and, where it finds a passage, the whole herd runs riot at once in defiance of consequences. Thus, in the case of witchcraft in particular, we are presented with the most humiliating spectacle of mortal folly and blindness, in certain ages and countries, while hundreds and thousands have fallen victims to credulity, perverseness, and bigotry.

We are now arrived at a period in the history of man where it would be wholly in vain to expect, in regions in which science has fairly expanded its beams, that any pretences to supernatural endowments, and a partial suspension of the known laws of nature, would be listened to. It would at first be regarded with sovereign contempt ; and, if that alone were found insufficient to stop its career, a few of the most hard-hearted and penetrating of mankind would apply to it the prismatic

glass of truth, would analyse the elements of which it was composed, and would suddenly compel it to hide its head in irrecoverable confusion.

It has ordinarily been said, "It is in vain for you to endeavour to palm things upon me by the power of testimony, to tell me of the leap you achieved in Rhodes; shew me the things you pretend to relate; subject the scene to the evidence of my senses; and I may perhaps be induced to believe."

But here the very reverse is seen to take place. We see at once that, if a man in all respects similar to Jesus were to appear in England in the nineteenth century, he would have no chance with us. The event would be altogether different. He might make some converts among the illiterate and the ignorant. For, in every country, constituted as civil society at present is, there will be credulous persons, untinctured with the first elements of reasoning, that will give in to the grossest impositions. But we see, even in the apostles' time, "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble were called;" and, as St. Paul phrases it, "God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty." (1 Cor. i. 26, 27.) And much more would that be the case now. Except that the foolish and the weak might indeed be converted; but the learned, and those who were familiar with the elements of genuine instruction, would remain unmoved, clear in their judgment, and sound and constant in all

their principles of reasoning. It is not indeed to be wondered at, in such a country as Judea, so penetrated with all the miseries of slavery, so immersed in ignorance and superstition, that the "learned pate should duck" to the imbecile, the unapprehensive to the dull.

But among us what our senses would reject we receive upon testimony. Because eighteen hundred years have passed, because time has rendered things confused and obscure, and taken away the sharpness of outline, that would make them at once luminous and clear to us, we take in the whole crudely and without discrimination, and believe merely because our fathers believed before us. It is surely time that we should lay aside our leading-strings. We are sufficiently matured in powers of understanding, and in the knowledge of nature. We should shake off our fetters and all that cramped and confined our faculties, and submit the whole to the severest examination. Even as we have discarded witchcraft and the belief in ghosts, so should we discard a faith that is founded in miracles. Most of all when these miracles are not subjected to the test of our senses, but we are required to receive them merely because a set of credulous Jews imagined that they witnessed them eighteen hundred years ago.

It is proper, also, that we should consider how many things must be assumed before the alleged miracles of Christianity can be made available as a foundation for our faith in its doctrines.

First, we must assume certain attributes and dispositions in a God, the supposed intelligent Creator and Governor of the universe. Till this is done, a miracle is merely an unforeseen and extraordinary event, that baffles the powers of human foresight. It leads to nothing, and authorises no inference, especially of so alien and altogether unconnected a character, as, because I have witnessed a supernatural event, I am therefore to believe the truth of a certain theoretical dogma.

We must therefore assume that God has a friendly and auspicious intention in thus suspending the established constitution and course of nature. Humanly speaking, He is somewhat dissatisfied with the ordinary train of antecedents and consequents, and is desirous so far, and for a special purpose, of superseding them. He is desirous of speaking to His creatures, and communicating to them something that shall be for their advantage. Without assuming all this, a miracle is nothing, is *merely an unforeseen and extraordinary event that baffles the powers of human foresight.*

A miracle, therefore, needs no interpreter. We will suppose some man stands forward in that character. He says, "This interruption of the laws of nature is produced in my behalf." But how shall we ascertain the authenticity of his mission? Thus we are told that Columbus, when in the island of Cuba, having by his astronomical skill foreseen an eclipse of the moon, told to the savages what was to happen, and persuaded them

that his God would cause the moon to withhold her light, and appear of a bloody hue, as an emblem of the vengeance ready to fall on them. Any man, by presence of mind only, may turn to his advantage an event with which in reality he has not the remotest connection. Thus it is that Jesus himself predicted that "there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and should shew great signs and wonders : insomuch that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect." (Matt. xxiv. 24.)

That a man, therefore, should affirm, upon occasion of some real or supposed supernatural event, "This is produced, that you may believe in the proposition I announce to you," proves nothing. The coincidence between the event and the speaker who appeals to it as his authority may be purely accidental. There ought to be, as is affirmed by the evangelist to have happened at the baptism of Jesus, "a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved son, in him I am well pleased." (Matt. iii. 17.) And then what is a voice from heaven ? In sound natural philosophy there is neither upwards nor downwards. Shall we believe, as is related in the close of the history of Jesus, that, while his disciples "beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts i. 9) ; and thenceforth he sitteth at the right hand of God ? The imagination that God dwells in the heavens above us, and that every communication from Him must descend from the empyrean,

is purely a prejudice begotten by ignorance upon superstition.

In reality, there are but three ways in which a rational mind can become satisfied of the truth of a proposition. The first is when the proposition is self-evident. And this perhaps, when strictly examined, occurs only in cases where the proposition is identical, and the terms in which it is stated, both subject and predicate, are found to mean the same thing, varied in the form of expression only. The second is experimental. It is thus we become acquainted with the system of the universe, that is, by seeing, as often as the case occurs, that like antecedents are attended with like consequents. The third is by deduction. In this way, that is, by propositions, the later flowing unquestionably from the former, that we proceed in a strict chain of reasoning. It is thus that Euclid built up his *Elements of Geometry*.

Everything that does not come to us in one of these three ways rests upon authority only, and is to be regarded with an eye of scepticism and jealousy. Whether an invisible being speaks to us in the voice of thunder, or a blind man is restored to sight, this is wholly unconnected with the truth or falsehood of a proposition. I am called upon to believe; and, in proportion as I am a reasonable being, I am called upon to be doubly on my guard before I yield to evidence of this sort. The proposition was true before, or it was not

true: the supernatural event produces not the smallest alteration in that respect.

In addition to these considerations on miracles in general, it is but reasonable that we should attend to the particular character of the miracles exhibited by Jesus. His favourite miracle appears to have been the casting out of devils. That is, as he explained it, one of the infernal host, which of old were driven out of heaven for engaging in rebellion against the Most High, was permitted by God, for purposes best known to Himself, to take possession of the body of a living man, and thus to make him appear frantic and blasphemous. This (or these) unhappy men are described as having their dwelling among "the tombs, and no man could bind him, no, not with chains, . . . for the chains had been plucked asunder, and the fetters broken in pieces; and always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, . . . saying, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." "For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit! . . . And the spirit besought him much, that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine." And Jesus deferred to their request. "And,

when they were come out of the man, they went into the swine. And the swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea (they were about two thousand), and perished in the waters." (Matt. viii. ; Mark v. ; Luke viii.) This is one only of a multitude of examples of Jesus casting out devils ; but it is told with the greatest number of particulars.

One question that presents itself on this occasion is, Were these possessions permitted by God, purposely that Jesus by this means might manifest his power ? How comes it that there is not perhaps one well-authenticated story of such possessions since the time of the apostles ?

There is a certain degree of good sense in the remark of Rousseau, addressed to the professing Christians of his day, "You believe in the New Testament, in consideration of the miracles therein recorded. Now I manifest a superior degree of docility ; for I believe, though I acknowledge that the miracles interpose an additional difficulty in the way of my belief."



CONCLUSION.

CONCLUSION.

THE conclusion and moral of the whole of these Discourses may be expressed in the homely proverb, *Hoc age*. Or, more poetically, in the language of the Hebrew sage, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." (Eccles. ix. 10.)

It is the wisdom of man to put forth his strength and apply his energies to that which he strenuously purposes. Let him suffer no distraction. Let him not relax, either in spirit or intentness, of that at which he aims.

We know what we are ; but we know not what we shall be. What is there behind the curtain, beyond the extremest verge of our sublunary life ? Probably nothing : neither "work, nor device, nor knowledge." But he who gives the reins to his mind, to consider "in the sleep of death what dreams may come," can never be fully aware to what an extent he unnerves his "better part of man." Let us then resolutely shut the door against "thick-

coming fancies." Let us shut out the figure of such beings as "lawless and uncertain thought imagines howling." These conceptions with some men will "unfix the hair, and make the seated heart knock at the ribs." With others they perhaps will appear to have little effect, more to be trifled with than deeply pondered upon. But we can never be sure. Those things which were inculcated into us when children, and which afterwards we regard but as "a woman's story at a winter's fire, authorised by her grandam," will often not be obliterated, but leave their marks and scars, to last as long as thought or reflection shall continue. It is of ill effect to the erectness and independence of a man, for him for one day to have been a slave. He will remember, it may be, how he trembled and cowered, and will perhaps never be the man he might have been. But this will be more strikingly the case when the master to whom we submitted was originally invisible, and of consequence some image, some shadowy and evanescent representation of him, may still pursue us, as a thing that demonstration itself cannot utterly exclude.

We know what we are ; but know not what we might have been. We are imperceptibly weakened ; our energies are not full and entire ; we cannot concentrate our whole strength, as we might have concentrated it. We may say, as in *Macbeth*, "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand—Great Neptune's ocean will not wash" away the stain. To be independent and

erect is essential to the perfect man. To stand in awe of neither matter nor spirit. To fear (for fear we must) those things which in the world of realities we may encounter, and which may subdue us. But to fear nothing unnecessarily, and with superstition. And, *si fractus illabatur orbis*, to witness the ruin with a calm and composed frame of spirit.

We know not what we might have been. But surely we should have been greater than we are, but for this disadvantage. It is as if we took some minute poison with everything that was intended to nourish us. It is, we will suppose, of so mitigated a quality as never to have had the power to kill. But it may nevertheless stunt our growth, infuse a palsy into every one of our articulations, and insensibly change us, from giants of mind, which we might have been, into a people of dwarfs.

It has been strangely supposed however that, however revolting is this creed to the genuine dictates of human understanding, its propagation is nevertheless necessary to control the flood of profligacy and vice which would otherwise overflow the world. I remember a conversation I had with Dr. Rees, the resident tutor of the college where I was educated, in which I put it to him whether he sincerely believed in the torments which the damned in hell are to suffer, we are told, to all eternity. He frankly confessed that he did not; but added that it would be of very dangerous consequence, if we were to

shake this creed in the minds of the vulgar, that they would make no great account of the punishments of hell, if they were to last a thousand years only, but that, when they were told they were to be never-ending, this terrified them, and made them pause, ere they would incur such stupendous consequences.

I have the misfortune to differ from this opinion. I believe that the vulgar are not so nice in their distinctions. I hold that they do not discriminate between a thousand years of torture and an eternity, the last of which is in reality an idea to which the human understanding is scarcely commensurate. I conceive that, if they were truly and sincerely persuaded that their offences here were to be followed by one year, three hundred and sixty-five days of unremitted torment, the whole to be closed with annihilation, this would have as full an effect to deter them from the perpetration of crimes, as if they were menaced with an eternal punishment.

But, in reality, the fears of damnation, of an imaginary hell, of which no man can form a credible and tangible idea, are of much too aerial and evanescent a nature to have great effect in the midst of the busy scenes of human life, and of the tumult of the passions, upon the conduct of men. They confess the truth of the doctrine as an article of their creed. They never pretend to dispute it. They swallow it whole, as they received it from their progenitors, and it interferes little or nothing with their digestion of the temptations of life. They

reserve the consideration of it as a matter seriously to be meditated for the solemn and penitentiary days of their existence. It is requisite, if we would make a strong impression on the mind respecting it, that it should be set before us in emphatic and grave discourse. They are but few persons, and those of a diseased and melancholy temperament, upon whose thoughts this question dwells on level occasions, and without some express excitement. In periods of sickness, or in the immediate danger of death, upon criminals, either in imprisonment, or having received sentence of death from an earthly judge, such subjects will frequently obtrude so as painfully to harass the mind, and even to afflict it with great agonies. Though in this last case it will generally happen that a clergyman is called in, who, from the most obvious motives of humanity, will seek to soothe the wretched sufferer, and will set before him the efficacy of repentance, which is never too late on this side the grave; and, in consequence, the criminal by degrees becomes tolerably composed, and quits his existence with a humble hope, often with no ordinary confidence in the divine mercy.

Men have believed during the successive centuries, of the Christian era, because they dared not enquire. They have regarded every nascent inclination to doubt, as the suggestion of the evil one. They have seen that faith is made the vital and saving principle in the Scriptures. How great is our danger, where the least error may be

damnable! How subtle are the inroads of mistake! How easily are we brought to assent to what we wish may be true! Who shall say that he has held in equal poise the balance of his understanding, and that no bias has crept in unawares, that shall have perverted the whole train of his conclusions? Will not this be a realising of the parable of him who "sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares?" (Matt. xiii. 25.)

And then "the Lord our God is a jealous God." (Exodus xx. 5.) Shall He have suspended the whole course of nature, have interfered by a series of stupendous miracles, and have sent His only son, whatever being may be described by that mysterious epithet, to suffer and to die amongst us, that we may live; and shall we condemn this revelation, and treat it as an imposture? Will not God resent the attempt to frustrate His infinite condescension, and to set at nought the instruction He has marvellously vouchsafed us? God sent His servants first, that they might collect the fruits of His vineyard: "and the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another; . . . last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son;" but him also they maltreated and despised: "When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" (Matt. xxi. 35, ff.)

In consequence of this state of things, the majority of

men in a Christian country dare not trust themselves with their own understandings. They do not exactly believe. But, seeing the professed creed of their ancestors for many generations, remembering the lessons and the prayers they were taught to repeat before their lips could fully articulate the sounds, seeing the thousands of churches that have been built, the vast establishments that have been settled, the numerous train of clergy that have been spread over so many parts of the earth, they think it a safer course to submit themselves in silence to the religion that seems entailed upon them by their birth.

There are in reality, in matters of religion, two kinds of belief,—one that thinks of, and the other that does not think of, the “secrets of the world unknown.”

The first, in its natural and full operation, leads to madness. If we think daily and hourly of a future state, as laid down in the Scriptures, if we recollect how peculiar and uncommon are the qualifications that characterise the elect, how it is scarcely possible for a rational and cautious mind to satisfy itself that it possesses these qualifications, how “strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life,” it is impossible that that way we should escape madness. If we went about the world, if we lay down every night, and rose every morning, with the conviction that our lot after death would be to be “cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev. xxi. 8), it

could not be that we should pay the attention required for the ordinary affairs of life. How, beyond measure, wretched and contemptible would be these things, compared with the thought which in that case would for ever engross us !

Those persons, therefore, who have the future fate of mankind continually before their eyes, must of necessity take refuge in some strong delusion, as a drowning man will catch at every twig, persuading themselves that they are among "the few that shall be saved." It is even thus that men in the article of death, and malefactors, who have incurred the last sentence of the law, send for a priest, have a few prayers recited over them, receive the unction of salvation, and pass away with the "sure and certain hope" that the gates of heaven are already open to receive their souls. Who does not see that this is mere quackery, which a man must part with all sobriety and soundness of understanding before he can believe ? But these men rock themselves in the cradle of faith, "in pleasing slumber lull their sense, and in sweet madness" become "robbed of themselves." This is the kind of belief that is found in a small minority of mankind.

But the rest of our race in Christian countries are content with an indolent kind of belief that scarcely ever calls to mind the articles of its creed. They say, "Oh, ay, that is all very true ; I shall find a time to think of it ; but not now." And the time scarcely ever comes.

They "live without God in the world." Some of them go to church; but they dwell in a decent exterior, and carefully banish from their minds what the church was made to present to them, as things that would unseasonably disturb their composure. They skim the surface, but are careful to draw no blood. They rarely think of those things they profess to believe. They lock them up, as Bluebeard locked up the bodies of his murdered wives, and regard it as the most dreadful of afflictions if the key should be applied to the lock, and the horrible secrets within should once take air, and be disclosed.

But how pitiable is the state of the man to whose inheritance has fallen this unthought-of creed! He is forever conscious that he is attended by and dogged with a reality which, if once it should intrude, and, having intruded, should keep possession of his soul, would poison all his pleasures, and render life intolerable. He must keep himself in a state of perpetual inebriety. He knows that he has a faith, "which he does most abhor, which he would not think of, but that he must, and that when it occurs to him, he is perpetually at war between will and not." By habit he acquires considerable skill in keeping the foe at arm's length from him; but he is continually in dread of the time when it will no longer be said nay. In reality, that time almost never comes. Even at the period of death, we are so unaccustomed to these thoughts, and the petty things of sense so perpetu-

ally intrude, that the world to come, though the case is so imminent, is little adverted to. The belief of the great mass of mankind is very nearly akin to no belief; and we complain of the pricking of a pin, when in consistency we should be thinking of fire and brimstone,

“Of torture without end, a deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur, unconsumed.”

Yet how poor is the state of that man who at least thinks he believes in these things, and has no refuge but in flying from the recollection of that which, if true, concerns him infinitely more than all others! What infinite imbecility and laboured distraction must intrude upon the man so circumstanced! “Oh, how unlike” what man, but for this emasculating creed, seems capable of becoming! “How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a God!”

It is by such means, then, that men have gone on from age to age, not daring to dispute, not daring to submit to the criterion of their reason,—a dogma the most revolting to our understanding, the most absurd, and the most horrible. We dare not enquire, we dare not frame propositions, and draw conclusions on the subject. We think it safer to abide in a sort of belief, and to refrain

from speculating on so perilous a question. We bow down our faculties in silence, deluding others and deluding ourselves, and subscribing to tenets the most groundless and indefensible.

THE END.

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